

FROM THE PEW TO THE MAT:
SEEING AND HEARING THE OUTSIDER

A Practical Research Project
presented to
the Faculty of the
Claremont School of Theology

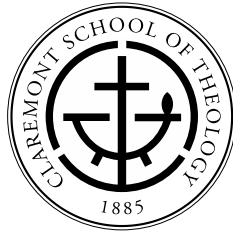
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

By
Amber Mattingly
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This Professional Project completed by

Amber Mattingly

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of the degree

Doctor of Ministry

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Lincoln Galloway

Dean of the Faculty

Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook

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ABSTRACT

From the Pew to the Mat: Seeing and Hearing the Outsider

By

Amber Mattingly

From the Pew to the Mat offers a practice that creates a safe enough space for outsiders to feel invited to share their experience of the Divine. This project designed an intentional non-traditional sacred space, Satsang Yoga, that includes meditation, asanas, the reading of a sacred text and facilitated dialogue to enable people from any or no religious background to build community around embodied spiritual practices in the search for truth, healing, and transformation.

In visualizing those who have been hurt by or ostracized by traditional religious institutions, this work draws on the story of Hagar. The story of Hagar, the outsider, is located at the beginning of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sacred text. Her story teaches that God's particular love for a people does not exclude love for others. God searched for Hagar, offered Hagar an opportunity to give voice to her experience, and Hagar boldly offers the world a name for God, the God who sees. Her story offers the theological foundation for seeing and hearing the outsider.

Henri Nouwen's book, *Life of the Beloved*, provided a common text to facilitate discussion about truth, healing and transformation. Nouwen wrote *Life of the Beloved* for people who did not participate in traditional religious practice but longed to find a spiritual path that offered meaning and hope for daily living. Nouwen invited the participants in this project to consider their experience of being chosen, blessed, broken, and given.

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Chapter 1

Project Research

Introduction

This project addresses the need for non-traditional spaces, such as Satsang Yoga, where people of different or no religious backgrounds can come together and build an intentional community around a format of embodied spiritual practices to create a sacred space that searches for truth, facilitates healing, and a path for transformation.

Thesis Statement

This project seeks to gather yoga students from any or no religious background into a non traditional Sacred Gathering (or Satsang) which includes meditation, asanas, and facilitated dialogue around an inspirational text such as Henri Nouwen's Life of the Beloved which looks at the intersection of life and spirituality for the purpose of seeking the truth about one's self and one's spiritual journey.

Context

I am a minister who grew up belonging to several different denominations. I appreciate my varied religious upbringing because I see and appreciate the strengths found in each. I appreciate how each of them speaks into my life giving me a rich image of the larger Body of Christ. The downside of exploring many Christian traditions in my early life is that I became an

outsider to the tradition I chose in my adult life. In my ministry in the Disciples of Christ denomination, I borrowed from my experience in other Christian traditions to help the local church see the need to show compassionate care for people beyond their membership. Through my husband's Doctor of Ministry project on church culture, we learned that our church culture emphasized community: people over tasks, insiders instead of outsiders. Directly opposite of the church, my unique ministry aptitude focused on impact: tasks over people, outsiders instead of insiders.

The birth of our first child in 2004 changed my world because early on we realized he had autism. Having a child with autism is what lead me to the yoga community. After being a yoga student for seven years, I longed to take my practice to the next level, so I signed up for Yoga Teacher Training (YTT). I found my church lacking the ability to care for someone who thought and acted out their Christian faith differently from what they considered normal. Even as a minister who loves the church dearly, I sadly admitted that I did not sense the healing presence of God in the church like I did in the yoga studio. During my training, I began thinking about how creating a yoga community is similar to creating a church community.

Like the church, yoga offers space for spiritual practices on many levels. People participate in church life for a wide range of reasons from engaging in church life because of family ties, for community support, and some hope that the church will help them connect to God. Similarly, people practice yoga only for the physical benefits, some begin to realize the mental and emotional benefits, and others hope for greater union with the Divine. Like churches, yoga communities offer service projects, book studies, and even potluck meals for fellowship.

Also, I started considering the similarities behind preparing a Christian worship experience and the preparation behind creating a yoga class. Church and yoga include music, a

ritual or plan to work through from beginning to end, community building elements, prayer or meditation, a message or theme, and a benediction or closing remarks. The idea occurred to me to begin preparing for and teaching classes like I would for a worship experience.

In talking with church planters and in helping create new worship expressions for churches, I have sat around tables discussing what we feel people outside the church walls would be attracted to in the church. We speculate and assume based on our own desire to lead in a more creative direction with our worship expression, to find relevant ways to communicate the good news, and because our church decline demands that we reach new people. We fill committees, planning teams, and creative worship groups with people who are insiders in the church asking them to think on behalf of people outside the church.

I have a unique ministry because of the inclusive nature of a yoga class. I teach people from various religious backgrounds or no religious background. As I teach the physical practice and add in the spiritual message, I am always curious to hear the response. My classes are different than most of the yoga teachers in my community and people come to hear what message I'll share next.

Justification

In my experience, most people desire to be a part of a community where they can share their hurts and stories of healing. Some people find care and support within the church and others would not think of the church as a place that would offer compassionate care. Yoga communities are filling a need for emotional support and physical care for people with a religious background or with no religious background. The popularity of yoga and the inclusiveness of the

embodiment practice show great potential for creating sacred gatherings as an alternative way of doing ministry. I wanted to develop a new format that focuses on the spirituality of yoga where the mind, body and soul are engaged in meditation, asanas, and facilitated dialogue around a sacred text such as Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved* that explores the intersection of life and spirituality for the purpose of seeking truth about one's self and one's spiritual journey.

Audience

The audience for this project includes clergy and lay leaders who are seeking ways to build community with people from different religious backgrounds or from no religious background. It provides a model for any individual who wants to communicate with persons who understand themselves as spiritual or are seeking meaning in life.

Research

Mr. Rogers found a unique way to be a minister to people who might not enter the doors of a church, but who would turn on the TV for an uplifting message. In the film, *Won't You be My Neighbor*, Rev. George Wirth said that Rogers brought a spiritual dimension to the program that felt inclusive. For example, Rogers style of communication was not an oration, but rather an invitation to communication where listening and times of silence were key.¹ For people from religious or no religious background, this ground breaking community where Mr. Rogers invited

¹ *Won't You be My Neighbor*, directed by Morgan Neville (Tremolo Productions, 2018), 36:50 to 38:41.

people in, grew in viewership or ‘membership’ as people regularly attending his program. Through the messages and songs, they found a sense of belonging in a space where they could experience radical kindness, empathy, and acceptance. In some ways, this neighborhood community was a model for the growing neighborhood yoga community and a forerunner to the Satsang.

Today, religious institutions face similar challenges in finding a way into the lives of busy people. Many Christian authors write about the decline of the church. They give ideas for how to help our churches reach new people and secure the membership of the current people in attendance. A few new books gaze outward at what is happening beyond the church walls. Dottie Escobedo-Frank and Rob Rynders wrote *The Sacred Secular* exploring the idea that church buildings are only one example of many places being used for sacred gatherings. Coffee shops, bars, community centers, restaurants and yoga centers are considered “third places.”² According to sociology professor Ray Oldenburg, “The third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.”³ Third places are naturally more inclusive gathering spaces that allow for the possibility of meeting people inside our social network and outside of our network.

In *The Sacred Secular* Rob Rynders asks, “What if the benedictional charge to go out in the world is no longer valid because church is happening out in the world? Can we imagine that radical of a transformation, and can we live through it?”⁴ From the Pew to the Mat involves

² Dottie Escobedo-Frank and Rob Rynders, *The Sacred Secular: How God is using the World to Shape the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 65.

³ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Boston: De Capo Press, 1999), 16.

⁴ Escobedo-Frank and Rynders, *The Sacred Secular*, 79.

understanding that sacred gatherings take place outside of the church. The project will expand upon the research of Escobedo-Frank and Rynders to draw out the spiritual message that resonates with people who meet in one of the third places, the yoga studio.

Jonathan Merritt's book *Learning to Speak God from Scratch* explores the questions around the use of sacred language in American culture. Studies show that Millennials are engaging more in spiritual conversations than former generations. Merritt views this trend as an opportunity to revive our sacred words. He noticed the trouble of speaking Christian language when he moved from "a suburban neighborhood in the heart of the Bible Belt" up to New York City and began a conversation with a new friend who writes a religious column.⁵ Throughout their dialogue, the new friend stopped Merritt anytime he used a religious word to ask what Merritt meant by that word.⁶ This troubled Merritt that language can hold beautiful meaning for some insiders and terrible memories for those outside the church.

In an interview with Onbeing, Ruby Sales, social activist and theologian, talks about a defining moment in her life. She felt guided in a conversation with her friend's daughter to ask the question, "Where does it hurt?"⁷ Sales told the interviewer that this one simple question set her friend's daughter free to share things that she had never felt she could share before. Later in the interview, Ruby Sales says that most people begin speaking about what they hate, but underneath this hate is a love that has been lost, taken away or stolen. In creating safe space for dialogue, Sales' experience informs the project's intention to not only listen to the participant's words, but to hear beyond their words to include emotion, tone, and body language.

⁵ Jonathan Merritt, *Learning to Speak God from Scratch: Why Sacred Words are Vanishing—and How We Can Revive Them* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 3.

⁶ Jonathan Merritt, *Learning to Speak God from Scratch*, 5.

⁷ Ruby Sales, interviewed by Krista Tippett, "Where Does it Hurt?" On Being.org (September, 15, 2006), 7.

Peter Rollins in *How (Not) to Speak of God*, gives an example of how Christians can engage in dialogue with spiritual people of religious background or no religious background.⁸ Rollins' community enters a dialogue committed to listening and open to changing their own way of thinking based on the thoughts shared. He calls this style of engagement evangelism. He bases his new idea of evangelism on the stories of missionaries who went to other countries to bring the people the message of Jesus and instead found Jesus's message among those they would attempt to save. Rollins writes, "How many of us have learnt too late that our initial idea, that by serving the world we will help bring God to others, has eclipsed the wisdom that in serving the world we find God there."⁹

In *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian*, Paul Knitter writes that religious authors primarily expound on the Christian Sacred Text, tradition, or on their own experience.¹⁰ Knitter felt compelled to reach outside of traditional Christian paths of inquiry to include looking at other faith traditions. He believes that crossing over to engage in Buddhist practices and then coming back to his Christian religious tradition challenged and enhanced his understanding of his Christian faith. He writes to an audience who might be feeling that religions appear to be exclusive. Knitter offers a thoughtful dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity.

In *The Great Spiritual Migration*, Brian McLaren says, "If you want to see the future of Christianity as a great spiritual migration, don't look at a church building. Go look in the mirror and look at your neighbor. God's message of love is sent into the world in human envelopes. If

⁸ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2006), 53-54.

⁹ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 54.

¹⁰ Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian* (London: One World, 2009), xi-xiii.

you want to see a great spiritual migration begin, then let it start right in your body. Let your life be a foothold of liberation.”¹¹

Theological

My journey of learning to cultivate compassion for myself lead me to the Hagar narrative. My first understanding of Hagar developed through hearing the Abraham and Sarah narrative as the narrative of God’s people. From this understanding, I read Hagar as a threat to God’s plan. Engaging the story many years later after life offered me new experiences, I suddenly read her story differently. It is quite clear that The Other had changed me. In 2010, I preached a series of sermons on her story and then in 2012, I wrote a devotional for publication in *The Secret Place*, a Disciples of Christ devotional guide. Here is what I wrote:

For most of my life, I read the story of Abraham and Sarah focusing my attention on God’s interaction with these main characters. Lately, I have begun to cast my gaze on a character who plays a supporting role in this story. Hagar is the Egyptian slave woman taken as a wife by Abraham in order to fulfill God’s promise of a child. To my great surprise, God shows care and concern for Hagar as much as God shows care and concern for Abraham and Sarah. We all know that Hagar’s marriage to Abraham was not a part of God’s plan to bring about a child, but nevertheless, God makes room in the plan to care for this one slave girl. Hagar is cast out into the wilderness twice and twice God searches for her. Then, she is given the miraculous gift of seeing God with her own eyes and names this God “The God who Sees.” Hagar’s story reminds us that no one is outside the reach of God’s love.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for your great love. May we extend that boundless love to all of your children. Amen.

Rev. Amber Mattingly—Nixa, Missouri

¹¹ Brian McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World’s Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to be Christian* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 195.

The theological basis for my project lies in my belief that all people are created in the image of God no matter their religious background and that all people have a spiritual message to share. My project uses the picture of Hagar who bears a son to help Abraham and Sarah actualize God's promise to them. However, Hagar is treated poorly and runs away from their home. God finds Hagar and offers her the chance to speak about her hurt. God sees Hagar and offers her a blessing. Hagar names God in Genesis 16:13, "You are El-roi," meaning "The God who Sees."¹² Robert Alter in his commentary on Genesis states that God's seeing Hagar's suffering is complemented by God's hearing her suffering.¹³ God's presence profoundly impacted Hagar and her empowering message is recorded and shared by the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions.

Leadership

In this project, Henri Nouwen is the embodiment of the gracious leader. Nouwen wrote *Life of the Beloved* for people outside of traditional religious circles, so following his journey through his writing career will offer insight into how Nouwen approached this commissioned book. In *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen writes, "Indeed, the paradox of Christian leadership is that the way out is the way in, that only by entering into communion with human suffering can relief be found."¹⁴ Nouwen writes about the leader needing to find peace within so that they can turn and offer healing space for others. He says that hospitality is the key to healing. The first part of hospitality involves focusing the leader's attention on the participant.¹⁵ The leader must withdraw to give space for the individual to emerge in their own time. The

¹² Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the NRSV.

¹³ Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996), 70.

¹⁴ Henri Nouwen, *Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 77.

¹⁵ Henri Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 89.

second part of hospitality is community. A leader cannot take away the suffering of the individual, but the leader provides space and guidance as one who has experienced the path of suffering.¹⁶ Through the experience of sharing and listening, the leader and participants form a sacred gathering.

In our sacred gatherings, the participants will explore Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*. By the principle investigator using Nouwen's leadership principles and the group focusing on his book as the sacred text, Henri Nouwen becomes the satguru of our gatherings. Nouwen's thoughts and ideas will guide the sacred gathering. The book is divided into four main sections: Taken, Blessed, Broken & Given. Each section asks the participant to think about different times in their life, stories, and ways that they experience the intersection of life and spirituality. The participants will be asked to reflect on how Nouwen's word for each chapter resonates with their experience.

Yoga

"What makes yoga spiritual is the movements and it is more than the movements, it is the breath awareness. It is more than the breath awareness, it is our awakening to the present moment and it is more than the awakening, it is our intention to be awakened." I wrote these words and spoke this message during a yoga class I taught. This quote summarizes the spiritual quality of yoga and why yoga could be used in a sacred gathering for people of any or no religious background. According to B. K. S. Iyengar, "Yoga means the yoking of all the powers of the body, mind and soul to God. It means the disciplining of the intellect, the mind, the

¹⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 93.

emotions, the will, which that Yoga presupposes; it means a poise of the soul which enables one to look at life in all its aspects evenly.”¹⁷ T. K. V. Desikachar adds to Iyengar’s definition that yoga is the intention for change that the practitioner sets for their practice.¹⁸ Yoga is one of six systems of India known as “Darsana which means ‘to see.’”¹⁹ Yoga offers the practitioner an invitation to look closely and discover God present within while longing for connection to God’s boundless quality. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali never force any idea of God, but hold the practice open to anyone of any or no belief in God making the environment as inclusive as possible.²⁰

Gena Davis writes that yoga invites the practitioner to “celebrate the spiritual experience of being alive in our human bodies.”²¹ T. Anne Richards describes the practice of yoga as a “multidisciplinary system for self-transformation” that begins with the body.²² The body processes experiences imprinting the experience in our body and wiring our brains to interpret life through the lens of past experiences. Dr. Alane Daugherty explains that “any state of being we continually experience, especially ones that are deeply, or routinely felt, become our ‘operating system’ or the way we perceive and function in the world.”²³ Past experiences program the mind to interpret new experiences through the lens of the past experience. This operating system establishes the mental pathway for a person to relive the first experience through subsequent experiences that feel similar in nature to the first experience. Yoga gives the

¹⁷ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga: Yoga Dipika*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 19.

¹⁸ T. K. V. Desikachar, *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice* (Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1995), 6.

¹⁹ T. Anne Richards, “The Path of Yoga,” in *Contemplative Practices in Action: Spirituality, Meditation, and Health*, ed. Thomas G. Plante (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 144.

²⁰ T. K. V. Desikachar, *The Heart of Yoga*, 9.

²¹ Gena Davis, *YogaMass: Embodying Christ Consciousness* (Bloomington: Balboa Press, 2017), 61-63.

²² T. Anne Richards, “The Path of Yoga,” 152.

²³ Alane Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: A Journey of Transformation through the Science of Embodiment* (Bloomington: Balboa Press, 2014), 111.

practitioner the opportunity “to see” the lens through which they are interpreting the world inviting them to respond in new ways. The yoga practitioner begins to make changes first by having the body experience a new shape.

Eddie Stern writes that the “new shapes will help to change our perspective on ourselves and life because we are directly using our bodies to influence the way we process incoming information.”²⁴ Yoga works with the body and the mind as a whole because when the body changes shape the mind concentrates on the shape. The concentration involved in creating the new shape with the body rewires the brain through neuroplasticity, the ability of the neurons to form new connections. Judith Hanson Lasater and Ike K. Lasater write, “Spiritual practice is not the asana but the act of noticing during the practice of the asana.”²⁵ The goal of the asanas is to allow the yogi to sit comfortably in meditation for long periods of time.

Asanas and meditation involve breath awareness. The awareness of the breath brings the practitioner into the present moment by giving the mind a job to do that quiets the thoughts of the mind. Breath awareness shifts the practitioner into a calm and steady state by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Prana, the term used for breath, means more than breath because it describes the life force, the energy that fills the body with life, or the spark that purifies.²⁶ The breath reflects the state of the mind and affects the state of the mind. When the breath is erratic, the mind is turbulent, but when the breath calms through direction of the yogi, then the mind calms.²⁷ “My suggestion is that yoga, through postures, breathing, and focused

²⁴ Eddie Stern, *One Simple Thing: A New Look at the Science of Yoga and How it Can Transform Your Life* (New York: North Point Press, 2019), 35.

²⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater and Ike K. Lasater, *What We Say Matters: Practicing Nonviolent Communication* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2009), 21.

²⁶ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 43.

²⁷ Eddie Stern, *One Simple Thing*, 67.

attention, effectively balances the brain functions and nervous system, and through homeostasis, the nervous system knows what needs to be balanced or corrected at any given time,” writes Eddie Stern.²⁸ In his book, *One Simple Thing*, Stern writes that the affect that yoga through breath awareness has on the nervous system provides the basis for transformation.

Eddie Stern focuses on the importance of the vagus nerve in the parasympathetic nervous system.²⁹ The key to understanding the effectiveness of yoga is that yoga tones the vagus nerve. The practice of yoga engages the parasympathetic nervous system and promotes a calm state using the vagus nerve to communicate between the body and the brain. When the parasympathetic nervous system is engaged through the toning of the vagus nerve, the calm state of being promotes higher brain functioning through the prefrontal cortex in the brain. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for the expression of compassion and strengthening social bonds. Thus, the practitioner experiences the ability to move from “me” to “we.”

The practice of yoga emphasizes the intention of the practitioner. If the yogi engages in yoga with the intention for a healthy body, they will experience benefits.³⁰ Yoga welcomes any person offering the encouragement that they are exactly where they need to be. When the practitioner is ready, yoga offers a practice to promote inner peace through the intention of breath awareness. Then, if the yogi begins to experience transformation of the mind and body through movement and breath awareness, they notice changes in the way they operate in the world. The path of yoga leads a person to deeper levels of intimacy with the self and to expand beyond the limits of self to include all living beings in an interconnected experience of life. If the

²⁸ Eddie Stern, *One Simple Thing*, 74.

²⁹ Eddie Stern, *One Simple Thing*, 202-213.

³⁰ T. Anne Richards, “The Path of Yoga,” 157.

yogi intends to proceed down the path of greater unity of mind, body and spirit with the Divine, then yoga becomes a path for holistic transformation.

Format of Satsang Yoga

To develop the format for Satsang Yoga, research initially focused on Christian yoga worship experiences. Four Christian women were identified who developed or teach a community yoga worship experience: Gena Davis, Jennifer Hill, Bethel Lee, and Amy Aspey. The principle investigator personally interviewed, emailed and in some cases participated in the yoga experience from the fall of 2017 to the spring of 2019. Conversations included assessment of their target audience, style of yoga, and the effectiveness of their format.

YogaMass

Gena Davis from Houston developed YogaMass while serving as priest at an Episcopalian church. Davis describes YogaMass's worship service as "designed in accordance with the elements and flow of an Episcopal Rite III Eucharistic Service."³¹ YogaMass finds that their largest demographic is 40-60 year old Christians from many denominations. YogaMass travels all over the country offering an embodied Christian worship service.

Holy Yoga

Jennifer Hill teaches Holy Yoga in Kingwood, Texas. Hill shared that Holy Yoga was the first Nationally recognized Christian yoga program created 15 years ago. The teachers have

³¹ Gena Davis, email message to author, Spring 2019.

freedom in the structure of the practice because the experience focuses on the heart of the participant and the relationships built in the yoga community. Holy Yoga is used as a tool for evangelism in a church setting and some yoga studios offer the practice.

Yoga Chaplain

Bethel Lee developed Yoga Chaplain, a program for Christian yoga teachers to connect and offer a yoga worship experience online and locally. Yoga Chaplains offer worship experiences in many locations in North America. Bethel Lee began offering her format in a church setting welcoming mainly older Christian members of the church. Now, she is a campus minister engaging the task of reaching a younger audience.

YoWo

Rev. Amy Aspey created YoWo using the Christian yoga worship experience to gather a community as she planted Short North Church, a United Methodist Church in Columbus, Ohio.³² YoWo reaches primarily 35-45 year olds who are Christian, but not connected to a church, spiritual but no specific affiliation, or none. YoWo's setting varies from parks, art studios, and stadiums during the community gathering phase of the church plant. Now a regular practice is offered in Short North Church while continuing to partner with locations out in the community.

Yoga Mass, Holy Yoga, Yoga Chaplain and YoWo offer scripture or Christian storytelling with a dominant theme throughout a yoga flow style practice. The intention for the formats was to offer an embodied spiritual experience welcoming of all people. All four yoga

³² Gena Davis, Jennifer Hill, Bethel Lee, Amy Aspey, interviews, participation, and emails, Fall 2017-Spring 2019.

worship experiences welcome all people from any or no religious background, but find that their participants are Christians who have left the church, spiritual seekers, and Christians who enjoy a more embodied worship experience.

The Christian tradition follows a format for Sunday community gatherings and the yoga class has a flow to the experience. To develop the format for Satsang Yoga, the research crossed over, borrowing a term used by Paul Knitter in *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian*, to explore what formats the Buddhist and Hindu traditions use for sacred gatherings. Through these searches, the word satsang appeared. The meaning of the satsang resonated with the intent of this project: to explore truth in the company of others. Yogapedia describes Satsang as a gathering where the format involves teaching and meditation with rules to guide the time of discussion. In the past, a satguru shared a teaching, but now books or audio teachings are used to set the intention for the group's discussion.³³ Most satsangs in the Houston area include meditation, chanting, listening to a guru, exploring the meaning of the guru's words, chanting and meditation. The best explanation of the format for satsang is the Devanand Yoga Center website.³⁴

Research on satsang uncovered another fascinating development in new church starts. Yeshe Satsangs are being used in India and introduced in the United States as new ways of doing Christian church that meet the needs of people who hold religious and social ties with Hinduism and Sikh communities. Michelle A Vu wrote an article for the Christian Post in October of 2012 that described the Yeshe Satsangs in Northern India. She found that some Western Christian

³³ "Satsang," Yogapedia, accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/4997/satsang>.

³⁴ "Satsang Meetings," Devanand Yoga Center, accessed February 6, 2019, <http://houstonyoga.org/satsang-meetings/>.

pastors were concerned that the Yeshua Satsangs should reflect, live out, and share the love of Jesus.³⁵

Through these interviews and searches, a format developed. The practice is called Satsang Yoga. The unique elements of the Satsang Yoga practice are the addition of listening to a sacred text and dialogue. B. K. S. Iyengar points to the importance of time spent reading sacred texts. He writes, “To make life healthy, happy and peaceful, it is essential to study regularly divine literature in a pure place.”³⁶ Through the practice of asanas, the participants will be invited to feel their body expand, their mind quiet, and shift into a calm and steady state. Using this operating state, the participants will be invited to hear from each other and to speak their truth. This practice includes meditation, asanas, meditation, reading of a sacred text, facilitated dialogue, and concludes with meditation.

³⁵ Michelle A. Vu, “Following Jesus yet still Hindu or Sikh: Mission Leaders Weigh in on new Communities,” *Christian Post Church and Ministries* (October 26, 2012), accessed November 8, 2018, <http://christianpost.com/news/following-jesus-yet-still-hindu-or-sikh-mission-leaders-weigh-in-on-new-communities-83995/>.

³⁶ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 39.

Chapter 2

Theological Grounding

The Hagar Narrative

In order to begin a project that steps outside of a traditional religious setting to engage people not typically included in religious dialogue, a theology that grounds the project must first be established. From the Pew to the Mat finds theological grounding in Hagar's experience of God in Genesis 16. Arguably, this is the first narrative of a marginalized woman who is a triple outsider. She is an outsider in that she is a woman with no status, an Egyptian, and a slave. The powerful image of God given by Hagar, the outsider, to the readers of Genesis 16 is of a God who sees and hears. Phyllis Tribble in *Texts of Terror* describes this unique encounter, "Her naming unites the divine and human encounter: the God who sees and the God who is seen."³⁷ Tribble writes that the power to name God gives Hagar the title of a theologian.³⁸

The Hagar narrative invites the reader into a journey of transformation. The reader first meets a quiet Hagar who is present in the text by name only through the narrator's voice. Once she becomes pregnant, Hagar sees her complex situation for the first time. Her seeing inspires movement away from oppression to the loneliness of the desert. Then, God meets Hagar in the desert and she sees God, hears God's words, and speaks to God. Nancy Haught writes that Hagar's speech signifies her entrance into becoming a whole person.³⁹ The story follows the

³⁷ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 18.

³⁸ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 18.

³⁹ Nancy Haught, *Sacred Strangers: What the Bible's Outsiders can Teach Christians* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017), Kindle loc. 456.

transformation of a person considered an outsider and invites the reader to consider the process of transformation in their own lives and in the transformation of how insiders view outsiders.

An examination of the history of interpretation of the Hagar narrative reveals three essential points to consider when approaching the sacred text. First, each religious group tends to view people and characters inside the group in the most positive light while negatively viewing people and characters considered outside the group. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes this process as a natural tendency of social human beings. Human beings are wired to form groups and once a group is formed, insiders and outsiders become visible.⁴⁰ He writes, “But every Us is defined against a Them, the ones not like us. The one without the other is impossible. Inclusion and exclusion go hand in hand.”⁴¹ He points to the need for a theology among religious people that shifts from demonizing people not a part of their religious tradition to embracing “God’s call to see his (God’s) face in the face of the Other.”⁴² To embrace the story from Hagar’s perspective, the reader is challenged to peel back the layers of biblical worldview that attempts to absorb Hagar as property of Abraham and thus considered a part of the people of YHWH. Instead, the insider understands Hagar’s full humanity as a person with an Egyptian social, ethnic, and religious heritage.

The second essential point to consider is that not all interpretations have viewed Hagar negatively. Throughout history, individuals sought to expand the view of Hagar to include her positive attributes and God’s message through her story. These interpreters invite the reader to see Hagar as a gift to the narrative. Rabbi Sacks says that to overcome the natural tendency to

⁴⁰ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (New York: Schocken Books, 2015) 29-31.

⁴¹ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 31.

⁴² Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 25.

violence towards outsiders, human beings must be offered an invitation to experience the life of an outsider.⁴³ He says that a person who engages the experience of The Other will see the humanity of the Outsider and no longer categorize them as inherently evil. The outcome of such an experience is to understand that to be human is to embody a mixture of light and dark, good and bad.⁴⁴ Through the compassionate perspective, the Hagar narrative invites the reader to imagine the experience of The Other.

Third, George Segal and Doug Adams provide one way to transform the readers experience of the sacred text.⁴⁵ Embodying the emotions of different characters in the scene by acting out the story invites the actor to consider many ways of viewing the text and the various emotions of the characters in the text. Eddie Stern in *One Simple Thing* wrote, “when we decide that we need to look at our lives through a new lens, moving our bodies into new shapes will help to change our perspective on ourselves and life because we are directly using our bodies to influence the way we process incoming information; our worldview can easily be altered by putting ourselves into postures.”⁴⁶

This chapter seeks to understand the Hagar narrative from a compassionate perspective. According to Richard Rohr, a compassionate perspective enables the reader to hold many sides to the story together instead of needing to choose one side.⁴⁷ Rohr offers a vehicle to engage the compassionate perspective while thinking theologically and faithfully about the message of the

⁴³ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 179.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 181.

⁴⁵ Aaron Rosen, “Changing the Family Portrait: Hagar and Sarah in Art and Interfaith Dialogue,” *Religion Compass* 7, no. 5 (2013): 185.

⁴⁶ Eddi Stern, *One Simple Thing: A New Look at the Science of Yoga and How It Can Transform Your Life* (New York: North Point Press, 2019), 34.

⁴⁷ Richard Rohr, *Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For and Believe* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019), 213.

text. He calls this vehicle a “tricycle.”⁴⁸ The tricycle invites the reader to examine the personal experience of the reader which I wrote in the context section at the beginning of this paper, the afterlife or traditional interpretations throughout history, and then allows the scripture to speak a message from a God.

Hagar’s Afterlife

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim people, the three faiths who hold claim to the Hagar narrative have focused more time and attention on who is chosen.⁴⁹ Yvonne Sherwood offered the term “afterlife” to explore writings and art expressions that come after the life of the original story.⁵⁰ She observes that the claim of three faith traditions on this text makes this text a story of blessing and a story that, “pushes us into the social, the political, and the tangled complexities of families and nations.”⁵¹ As Jewish, Christian, and Muslim people have interpreted this story most of the problems revolve around who is included in God’s blessing and the thought that if one group is included, then everyone else is excluded. Phyllis Trible points out that each tradition uses the story to support their own faith tradition over and against their rivals.⁵² To justify which group is considered God’s people, commentators who developed the afterlife of the story of Hagar chose to highlight positive attributes of certain characters while downplaying or demonizing other characters. Thankfully not all commentators, writers, or artists used the story to accomplish this self-serving goal and the artistic expressions created give depth and beauty to

⁴⁸ Richard Rohr, *Universal Christ*, 213.

⁴⁹ Lynn Japinga, *Preaching the Women of the Old Testament: Who They Were and Why They Matter* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2017), 17.

⁵⁰ Yvonne Sherwood, “Hagar and Ismael: The Reception of Expulsion,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 68, no. 3 (2014): 287.

⁵¹ Yvonne Sherwood, “Hagar and Ishmael: The Reception of Expulsion,” 304.

⁵² Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, “Unto the Thousandth Generation,” in *Hagar, Sarah and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 7-8.

an already provocative story. This section will highlight a few commentators who step outside of how their religious community traditionally viewed Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar.

Hagar's Afterlife in Jewish Tradition

Adele Reinhartz and Miriam-Simma Walfish write in *Hagar, Sarah and their Children* that the Jewish tradition struggles with two ideals: a reverence for their ancestors and care for the powerless.⁵³ Both ideals are rooted in Judaism. Reinhartz and Walfish also point out that the Hagar narrative is problematic because of a theology of childbearing that teaches that a woman who becomes pregnant receives Divine favor. According to this belief, Sarah does not have Divine favor. On the other hand, Hagar who is Egyptian and a slave is the first to become pregnant and the only female in this story to have a Divine encounter.⁵⁴ Savania J. Teubal's *Hagar the Egyptian* attempts to peel back the layers of male dominant storytelling to uncover the sacred story of women. Teubal shows that Sarah and Hagar's stories are connected in many ways: they live far away from home, married to Abraham, have only one son, and are chosen to be the mother of many descendants.⁵⁵

Other commentators have questioned Abraham and Sarah's behavior while showing compassion to Hagar.⁵⁶ David Zucker and Moshe Reiss chronicle Hagar's afterlife in *The Matriarchs of Genesis*. They indicate that first century Jewish historian, Josephus Flavius writes

⁵³ Adele Reinhartz and Miriam-Simma Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence in Jewish Interpretation," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 102.

⁵⁴ Adele Reinhartz and Miriam Simma Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence in Jewish Interpretation," 110.

⁵⁵ Savina J. Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Traditions of the Matriarchs* (New York: Harper & Row Publishing, 1990), 195.

⁵⁶ Adele Reinhartz and Miriam-Simma Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence in Jewish Interpretation," 112.

that Hagar suffers because of her treatment of Sarah and paints a picture of Sarah's righteousness. Then, Josephus writes that God forgives Hagar. Zucker and Reiss also note that in the Book of Jubilees from the 2nd century BCE, the entire narrative of conflict in the family and Hagar's naming God is left out.⁵⁷ However, the Book of Jubilees shares positive stories about God hearing Hagar instead of Ishmael when she cried out in the wilderness, mentions Abram is sad because of losing his maidservant, and that Hagar and Abraham reunite at the end of the story claiming that the Keturah named as the last wife of Abraham is actually Hagar.⁵⁸ Robert Gregg adds that in Genesis Rabba, the midrash compares Hagar to David in a positive light because they both will have great leaders come from them.⁵⁹

Hagar's Afterlife in Christian Tradition

Like her Jewish afterlife, Hagar's Christian afterlife begins with the need to define who follows God in the line of Sarah and who is on the outside with Hagar. Hagar's first appearance is in Galatians 4 where Paul writes to tell the new Jesus followers that they don't have to be circumcised to become a Christian. Paul uses the framework that the Jews who are circumcised are continuing to follow the law making them slaves to the law and this means that their mother is Hagar the slave, but followers of Jesus are freed from the law making them children of Sarah.⁶⁰ Letty M. Russell writes that this is Hagar's second rejection: first in her representing the

⁵⁷ David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss, *The Matriarchs of Genesis: Seven Women, Five Views* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 99.

⁵⁸ David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss, *The Matriarchs of Genesis*, 101-102.

⁵⁹ Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 135.

⁶⁰ Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 161.

non-chosen people in the Hebrew Bible and now in Hagar being linked to the Jewish people who were the chosen ones in the Hebrew bible, but are now considered outsiders by Paul.⁶¹

In *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, Robert C. Gregg writes about third century church father, Origen, who wrote many surprisingly beautiful things about Hagar. Origen compares Hagar's story with the story of the woman at the well saying both encountered the word made flesh and that God opened Hagar's eyes to see a life-giving well just as Jesus offered the Samaritan woman eyes to see Jesus' living water.⁶² Origen writes that Jews and Christians act like Hagar crying for water while lying around a well, but then he lists Hagar as a role model because of her tears and prayers to God for provision.⁶³ Origen departs from Paul when he writes that God opened Hagar's eyes to salvation and talks about Ishmael having Divine favor.⁶⁴

Trible and Russell point out that during the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther begins by seeing Hagar only in a negative light because of his strong stance that the three faiths with claim on this text must remain divided because Jesus is the only way to God. Later, he softens to Hagar and Ishmael showing that they learned salvation by grace in the wilderness when God provides water.⁶⁵ Martin Luther also acknowledged that Hagar named God.⁶⁶

Feminist and Womanist writers have also given voice to women in the bible who are presented as outsiders, marginalized, powerless and oppressed. Adam Clark summarizes the intent of the Womanist theologian's approach. He writes, "In re-interpreting Hagar, we are

⁶¹ Letty M. Russell, "Twists and Turns in Paul's Allegory," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 74.

⁶² Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 175.

⁶³ Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 177.

⁶⁴ Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 178.

⁶⁵ Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, "Unto the Thousandth Generation," 17-18.

⁶⁶ Tracy Kemp Hartman, *Letting the Other Speak: Proclaiming the Stories of Biblical Women* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 11.

reading the history and culture of Egypt as ‘historical text’ over and against the silences and suppressions of Hebrew male authors.”⁶⁷ Womanist theologians view Hagar’s story as relating to the life of African American women from the time of slavery. Delores Williams, a womanist theologian, writes that Hagar is “the first female to liberate herself from oppressive power structures.”⁶⁸ After Hagar’s liberation, God asks her to go back to her oppressors. For feminist theologian, Phyllis Tribble, El Roi speaks words that promote suffering while also give Hagar hope through a blessing of descendants like the patriarchs received.⁶⁹ Unlike Tribble, Williams sees God acting not as a liberating God, but in ways that secure life for Hagar and Ishmael, connect Ishmael back to Abraham as his heir, and enable Hagar to receive a blessing that includes Hagar’s descendants acquiring freedom from slavery.⁷⁰

Hagar’s Afterlife in Islamic Tradition

Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael are important to the Islamic tradition. The Qur’an speaks highly of both Ishmael and Isaac citing them both as prophets and righteous men with Ishmael being favored over humankind.⁷¹ Hagar’s name is not found in the Qur’an. A reference to her character is found in Surah 14:37 in the prayer of Abraham which mentions that he settled some of his family in a valley near the house of God so that they might establish prayer.⁷² This story gave commentators room to expound on the text. Hagar’s story is in the hadith which are the

⁶⁷ Adam Clark, “Hagar the Egyptian: A Womanist Dialogue,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 54.

⁶⁸ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 19.

⁶⁹ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 16.

⁷⁰ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 20-22.

⁷¹ Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell, “Unto the Thousandth Generation,” 7.

⁷² Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 215.

traditions from the words and deeds of Muhammad. The commentators write that the expulsion of Hagar is not due to Sarah's jealousy although the *Sahih Al-Bukhari* mentions tension between the two⁷³, but because God asked Abraham to build Mecca.

Muslim tradition does not preserve Hagar as a poor slave girl, but rather as a princess given to Abraham and Sarah by the Pharaoh when he suffers because of Abraham's lie about Sarah being his sister. So, Hagar is viewed as a gift from God and the King.⁷⁴ For her time spent wandering between the mountains in search of water for her son, Hagar is seen as establishing the ritual of the hajj when all faithful Muslims make a pilgrimage to Mecca.⁷⁵ The Islamic tradition views Hagar as a Divine agent sent by God to help Abraham establish true and faithful monotheism on earth. Hibba Abugideiri writes that Hagar was chosen by God because of her "taqwa" or God-consciousness which includes activism and self-initiation.⁷⁶ Hagar's taqwa (God-consciousness) is evident in her prayers to God being answered, her trust in God's provision, her walking for help, and in her faithfulness to help build Mecca. She is seen as "an exemplar of faithful submission and duty."⁷⁷

Hagar in Art

Hagar's story lives on in art, plays, songs, stories, poetry, sculpture and photography. Iain Provan lists some of her expressions in *Discovering Genesis*. In the

⁷³ Aaron Rosen, "Changing the Family Portrait: Hagar and Sarah in Art and Interfaith Dialogue," 182.

⁷⁴ Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 197.

⁷⁵ Hibba Abugideiri, "Hagar: A Historical Model for 'Gender Jihad,'" in *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 85.

⁷⁶ Hibba Abugideiri, "Hagar: A Historical Model for 'Gender Jihad,'" 86.

⁷⁷ Robert C. Gregg, *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings*, 219.

seventeenth century, Dutch artists Rubens and Rembrandt portray Hagar's story of being cast out in the wilderness.⁷⁸ Aaron Rosen writes that these seventeenth century Dutch artists showed compassion for Hagar and this opened the doors for other artists to portray her in a positive light.⁷⁹ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, her story lives on through plays like *Hagar dans le desert* (1781) by Comtesse de Genlis and *Hagar* (1848) by Isaac da Costa. Franz Schubert, an Austrian composer, wrote a song entitled *Hagars Klage* in 1811 and in 1806 Etienne Nicolas wrote a never performed opera named *Agar au desert*.⁸⁰

Yvonne Sherwood catalogs some of the expressions of the Hagar narrative in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the article, "Hagar and Ishmael: The Reception of Expulsion," Sherwood writes about Hagar's reception in art and literature, but she explains this is an interesting line of study since Hagar's story is about being excluded and not about reception.⁸¹ Sherwood notes that Hagar's afterlife is found in a few well-known artistic pieces, but mostly she is chosen by people on the outside who challenge authority and defend the marginalized. The most famous writing about the Hagar narrative is Herman Melville's portrayal of Ishmael in *Moby Dick*. The story's theme reverses the story of Ishmael and Isaac.⁸²

The role reversal and blur of identity continues in Edmonia Lewis' sculpture *Hagar in the Wilderness*. The sculpture is made with white marble and she gave Hagar European features. Yvonne Sherwood comments that "it embodies a protest against slavery and suffering."⁸³ In light of Lewis' Native American and African American heritage, Aaron Rosen views the blur of what

⁷⁸ Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 144.

⁷⁹ Aaron Rosen, "Changing the Family Portrait: Hagar and Sarah in Art and Interfaith Dialogue," *Religion Compass* 7/5 (2013): 183.

⁸⁰ Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 144.

⁸¹ Yvonne Sherwood, "Hagar and Ishmael: The Reception of Expulsion," 287.

⁸² Yvonne Sherwood, "Hagar and Ishmael: The Reception of Expulsion," 293-294.

⁸³ Yvonne Sherwood, "Hagar and Ishmael: The Reception of Expulsion," 297.

we know of Hagar's identity and the depiction in the sculpture to compel the viewer, "If we listen carefully, we might even read a more radically universal message on Hagar's lips: there is no longer Jew...or Christian or Muslim."⁸⁴

Aaron Rosen discusses the method of an artist named George Segal. George Segal, a Jewish sculpture, created *Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael*. For this sculpture, Segal chose a family who was sending their son off to college. He assembled the family into a scene where they were asked to embody the emotions of saying farewell to their son. Then, Segal wrapped the family members bodies frozen in the emotions of this moment and allowed the material to harden. After removing the wrap, he pieced the material back together. Rosen says Segal's process of creation invites the biblical reader to embody the text.⁸⁵ Doug Adams, a friend of Segal's, uses this technique of acting out the sacred text in his classroom to help his students feel the emotions of the moment and to take on new ways of viewing the characters.⁸⁶

Compassionate Reading of the Hagar Narrative

Riet Bons-Storm discusses how people's identities are connected to the body which is the smallest land they inhabit, and their unique holistic expression of themselves that empowers choices, and the place on earth where they live.⁸⁷ In the Hagar narrative, the story tells of the violation of her smallest land of occupation, her body, the inability for any character to see Hagar's human dignity, and the casting her out of the land where she lived on this earth. Hagar's

⁸⁴ Aaron Rosen, "Changing the Family Portrait: Hagar and Sarah in Art and Interfaith Dialogue," 184.

⁸⁵ Aaron Rosen, "Changing the Family Portrait: Hagar and Sarah in Art and Interfaith Dialogue," 185.

⁸⁶ Aaron Rosen, "Changing the Family Portrait: Hagar and Sarah in Art and Interfaith Dialogue," 188.

⁸⁷ Riet Bons-Storm, "A place to share: Some Thoughts about the Meaning of Territory and Boundaries in our Thinking about God and Humanity," *HTS: Theological Studies* 64, no. 1 (2008): 144-145.

experience of the God in the wilderness as the God who sees gives the people of God the first clue as to how to be with the stranger. The people of God are called to see the stranger in all their glory and in their vulnerability as human beings who desire safety, the freedom to be who they are, and to make their own choices.⁸⁸ Tracy Kemp Hartman writes, “For if we view Hagar as the child of God that she is and define her in sacred terms, it becomes possible for us to allow the story of God to emerge in unexpected and unpredictable ways in this very human story.”⁸⁹

Reading the story compassionately makes space for all God’s people represented in the text to be right and wrong at the same time and to show a God who is big enough to include them all.⁹⁰ In allowing the text to speak, the reader finds hidden within the text the answer to how to read the text compassionately. David J. Zucker notes that in Genesis 12, 16, 18, and 21 there are ten references to the root word for “hearing,” nineteen references to the root word for “seeing,” and eight words refer to eyes/sight.⁹¹ Phyllis Tribble points out two reference to hands. First, Abraham gives Hagar into Sarah’s hands and second, the hand of Ishmael will be used to continue to secure freedom for his people.⁹² Alter reminds the reader that when words are repeated in the text they bear significance for the theme of the narrative.⁹³ The primary vehicle for transformation is the body,⁹⁴ so within the text the reader is invited to use their body to understand the text more fully. To embody the text, the reader uses their eyes, ears, and hands with the intent to better understand the characters.

⁸⁸ Riet Bons-Storm, “A place to share: Some Thoughts about the Meaning of Territory and Boundaries in our Thinking about God and Humanity,” 151.

⁸⁹ Tracy Kemp Hartman, *Letting the Other Speak: Proclaiming the Stories of Biblical Women*, 13.

⁹⁰ Lynn Japenga, *Preaching the Women of the Old Testament: Who They Were and Why They Matter*, 17.

⁹¹ David J. Zucker, “Seeing and Hearing: The Interrelated Lives of Sarah and Hagar,” *Women in Judaism* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 3.

⁹² Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, 17.

⁹³ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 93.

⁹⁴ Alane Daugherty, *From Mindfulness to Heartfulness*, 5.

The full Hagar narrative is found in Genesis 16 and Genesis 21, but the following discourse will focus on Genesis 16. Genesis 16 is divided into four sections of text to highlight the transformation of Hagar.

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, "You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife.

Hagar's name means, "Other"⁹⁵ or "Outsider."⁹⁶ Her name describes her in that she is Egyptian, poor, single and a slave. Tracy Kemp Hartman wonders "there is no indication at the beginning of the story that she knows, much less worships, YHWH."⁹⁷ Adam Clark reminds the reader that there are theological perspectives that focus on the story from Hagar's Egyptian perspective including her Egyptian view of God which helps peel away the biblical interpretation of Hagar.⁹⁸ In this section, the character's status are set: Abraham is the master, Sarah is Abraham's wife and is the master of Hagar, and Hagar is Sarah's slave-girl. The word used of Hagar is *shifhah* or virgin who serves the mistress of the house.⁹⁹ Hagar has no power even over her body,¹⁰⁰ so Sarah gives her to Abraham without Hagar's consent. Sarah believes that God has power over pregnancy and the text does not inform as to whether or not she knew about Abraham's promise from God.¹⁰¹ Sarah acted according to Ancient Near Eastern law that

⁹⁵ Debbie Blue, "The Other Women." *The Christian Century* 131, no 25 (December 10, 2014): 10.

⁹⁶ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 226.

⁹⁷ Tracy Kemp Hartman, *Letting the Other Speak: Proclaiming the Stories of Biblical Women*, 9.

⁹⁸ Adam Clark, "Hagar the Egyptian: A Womanist Dialogue," 53-54.

⁹⁹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Lynn Japinga, *Preaching the Women of the Old Testament: Who They Were and Why They Matter*, 13.

describes surrogacy as a common practice to obtain a child.¹⁰² The Law of Hammurabi paragraph 146 states that if a wife is barren she can give her slave to her husband and if she doesn't give him a slave then he can take a second wife. Any women would rather give a slave to maintain her status because a second wife who bears a child would displace her.¹⁰³

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her.

Phyllis Trible in *Texts of Terror* writes, that Sarah and Abraham have been the main actors on the stage of this drama, but in verse four Hagar becomes the subject when she conceives.¹⁰⁴ Hagar's pregnancy changes everything. In this section, she steps onto the stage beginning to recognize her own self-worth. Now that she is pregnant, Hagar sees things differently, but Sarah sees within the old status structure.¹⁰⁵ Hagar shifted from being a *shifhah*, a servant, to an *'isha* which means wife and she is the wife with a baby.¹⁰⁶ Robert Alter points out that this is the first time Hagar sees.¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Gordon adds that this might be the first time she felt power and value in the world.¹⁰⁸ But her seeing has another side. She saw with contempt or

¹⁰² Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, 67.

¹⁰³ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 227.

¹⁰⁴ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Phyllis Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 39.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, 67-68.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, 68.

¹⁰⁸ Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Names God: Abraham's Dilemma and the Birth of Three Faiths* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 112.

Vateykal which has shades of meaning from disgust or contempt to a lowering in her esteem.¹⁰⁹ Having the full picture in mind, Hagar could have felt a new sense of self, a heightening of her status and saw Sarah lowered in her status maybe even with a flicker of haughtiness in her eyes. This does not last long because Sarah sees Hagar's change and demands Hagar return to being a *shifhah*.

Upon seeing Hagar's change, Sarah turns to Abraham for support. She appeals to him as the man in the house who according to the law should work out justice in their home and then she appeals to the highest judge, God, who sees everything.¹¹⁰ According to the structure of the home, Hagar now belongs to Abraham as his wife, but Abraham speaks for the first time giving Hagar back to Sarah as her slave-girl. In the Code of Hammurabi, if a slave surrogate sees her status change over her mistress then she can be sold,¹¹¹ but if she becomes pregnant and sees her status elevated over her mistress, she can be put back to her original status of slave.¹¹² Sarah had the law on her side, but Phyllis Tribble writes that this is another moment in the text where the two women could have cared for one another. The problem is they don't see eye-to-eye: one has a new way of seeing and the other clings to the old way of seeing.¹¹³ Hagar's new way of seeing forces her into action.

Sarah's treatment of Hagar does not reflect a shift to compassion although the story has already invited her twice to see the situation more fully to ignite an empathetic response. The same Hebrew expression is used to describe the abusive treatment Hagar received from Sarah

¹⁰⁹ David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss, *The Matriarchs of Genesis: Seven Women, Five Views*, 116.

¹¹⁰ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 192.

¹¹¹ Tivka Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 228.

¹¹² Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 192.

¹¹³ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 12.

and the abusive treatment Israel received as slaves in Egypt.¹¹⁴ Juliana Claasens writes about the emotions involved in the story of the two women.¹¹⁵ She reflects that it is the emotion of disgust, Hagar's disgust of Sarah and Sarah's disgust with Hagar that dehumanizes both characters.

The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the Lord said to her "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord as given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." So she named the Lord who spoke to her, "You are El-roi"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

This powerful and profound section of the sacred text begins with Hagar taking charge of her own life as she "claims her own Exodus"¹¹⁶ and is met by a Divine messenger by a spring which also means eye on the way to Shur. In *Hagar, Sarah and Their Children*, Tribble writes that this section expounds upon Hagar's new vision: new vision of Sarah in the past, new vision of herself which is present and ongoing, and holds a new vision of God in the near future.¹¹⁷ The new vision comes together at a spring or eye. Here the Divine messenger speaks four times and is God appearing as a human coming to aid a person in their suffering.¹¹⁸ The messenger is the first to call Hagar by

¹¹⁴ Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Names God: Abraham's Dilemma and the Birth of Three Faiths*, 10.

¹¹⁵ Juliana Claassens, "Just Emotions: Reading the Sarah and Hagar Narrative (Genesis 16, 21) through the lens of human dignity," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 2, Art. #787, 2.

¹¹⁶ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Phyllis Tribble, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," in Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell, 40.

¹¹⁸ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 193.

name signifying the first time Hagar is seen as a person with dignity and worth.¹¹⁹ The Divine messenger asks Hagar about her past and her future and the reader finally hears Hagar's voice for the first time in the narrative. The reader first sees Hagar have feeling regarding her pregnancy and her relationship with Sarah, then she takes action to free herself from her violent situation, and finally she speaks. The messenger calling her by name confirms Hagar's transformation. Nancy Haught writes that Hagar's speech signifies her entrance into becoming a whole person.¹²⁰

God's conversation with Hagar is seven long verses. The story slows down considerably allowing the reader to linger awhile at the spring.¹²¹ In a surprising twist, God tells Hagar to return to her masters. This instruction follows Near Eastern property laws that a slave must be returned to their master¹²² and there are severe penalties for not bringing back a runaway slave.¹²³ Tikva Frymer-Kensky wonders why God would follow the law over the biblical law of helping a runaway slave as found in Deuteronomy 23:16-17 and says this would have been a great cause for surprise to the first readers of the story.¹²⁴ The reason may be about survival as Delores Williams points out¹²⁵, but survival so that the promise of freedom can be secured through Abraham. A runaway slave woman and son have no protection. Those who harbor her could face severe punishment.

¹¹⁹ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 15.

¹²⁰ Nancy Haught, *Sacred Strangers*, Kindle loc. 456.

¹²¹ David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss, *The Matriarchs of Genesis: Seven Women, Five Views*, 93.

¹²² Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 230.

¹²³ David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss, *The Matriarchs of Genesis: Seven Women, Five Views*, 123.

¹²⁴ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 230.

¹²⁵ Delores S. Williams, "Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation," in *Hagar, Sarah and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 177.

The only way to be granted freedom is to return to Abraham and Sarah.¹²⁶ She returns with a promise from God that this will be her fate.

God announces that Hagar will bear a son and names him Ishmael meaning God heeds or God hears which will be expounded upon in Genesis 21. Then, God gives a blessing resembling the blessing given to Abraham. The annunciation and blessing precede Hagar's response to the messenger. She responds by naming God. In naming God, Hagar claims that she has power and knowledge about God.¹²⁷ She created a name for God, El Roi, based on her close encounter with this Divine messenger. God sees Hagar in the sense that God looks after or cares for Hagar.¹²⁸ Hagar responds with an elliptical statement that can be translated as follows, "Have I really seen (God) hereafter (his) seeing me?"¹²⁹ Robert Altar makes note that this explanation of God's name as El Roi is an expression of gratitude for having lived after seeing God because the Israelites believed that no one could see God and live.¹³⁰ Brian D. McLaren summarizes this section writing, "When Hagar is treated as a despised 'other' by Sarah, the Lord intervenes on Hagar's behalf and makes a promise to Hagar that shows she is of concern to the Lord as well: *I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count*. The Lord names him Ishmael, meaning God hears—and Hagar responds by

¹²⁶ Philip E. Friesen, *The Old Testament Roots of Nonviolence: Abraham's Personal Faith, Moses' Social Vision, Jesus; Fulfillment, and God's Work Today* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipit and Stock, 2010), 48.

¹²⁷ Lynn Japinga, *Preaching the Women of the Old Testament*, 14.

¹²⁸ Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16-50*, 3.

¹²⁹ Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott and Grant Macaskill, *Genesis and Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012), 9-10.

¹³⁰ Robert Altar, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, 71.

naming God *The One Who Sees Me*. So it must never be forgotten that God sees and hears the other.”¹³¹

Hagar is the first to say that God can see people.¹³² Charlotte Gordon writes that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are shaped by this one encounter¹³³ because all three religions believe that God desires relationship with humans and that humans can have a relationship with God. This encounter describes how God draws close to humanity. God sees and hears the suffering of humanity thereby modeling how humans are to attend to all of humanity with a caring eye and an ear for suffering. Gordon also writes that Hagar experiences another shift in her status from this God encounter. Hagar shifts from being a slave to the status of a mystic and from being oppressed to rising as a tribal leader.¹³⁴ With new ideas about God and new ideas about herself, Hagar returns.

Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

This story ends with Hagar returning to Abraham and Hagar. Abraham is exulted by the birth of Ishmael, Sarah is not built up, and Hagar is stripped of her naming power.¹³⁵ Even though the Divine messenger gives Hagar the name for her son, Abraham resumes the job of the man of the house in naming his son.¹³⁶ Hagar’s voice is silenced. The return home means returning to the old way of seeing. But Hagar is different. She

¹³¹ Brian D. McLaren, *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road? Christian Identity in a Multi-Faith World* (New York: Jericho Books, 2012), 122.

¹³² Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God*, 139.

¹³³ Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God*, 140-141.

¹³⁴ Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God*, 127.

¹³⁵ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 26.

¹³⁶ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 18-19.

sees herself differently. She left Abraham and Sarah in an effort to honor her own human dignity and worth. She spoke her truth to God who saw her and was seen by her. Hagar's transformation process has begun, but is not complete with one experience. She returns to life with Abraham and Sarah to complete the healing process and secure her freedom.

At the beginning of chapter 16, the reader is introduced to a character of little significance. In sixteen verses, Hagar blossoms into a Matriarch. Hagar earned the right to claim the first female to free herself from oppression,¹³⁷ first person that God appeared to in human form¹³⁸, the first person to see God,¹³⁹ the first to receive an annunciation,¹⁴⁰ the only woman to receive a promise of descendants,¹⁴¹ the only person to name God, and the first to bear Abraham's child. Later, some would see her as a prophet.¹⁴²

Conclusion

The Hagar narrative presents us with a story about "the other" from the very beginning of our sacred text. Right at the beginning, we are faced with "the other" in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious home. The Hagar narrative serves as a connection point for all three traditions offering us a story of how God is at work in the world. William P Brown writes, "God in Genesis chooses to be King and farmer, nighttime wrestler and daytime guest, heavenly and earthly, friend and foe, vulnerable and magisterial, sneaky and self-disclosed, human and Divine. And accompanying God's

¹³⁷ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 19.

¹³⁸ Robert Altar, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, 69.

¹³⁹ Nancy Haught, *Sacred Strangers*, Kindle loc. 472 and loc. 490.

¹⁴⁰ Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16-50*, 10.

¹⁴¹ Tracy Kemp Hartman, *Letting the Other Speak*, 12.

¹⁴² Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God*, 142.

presence is a voice filled with blessing and full of surprises.”¹⁴³ In the Hagar narrative, she chooses a new name for God out of her experience of God in her most vulnerable situation.

Riet Bons-Storm suggests that safe spaces must be created for people to see each other and hear the human experience of “the other.” Bons-Storm says that in interfaith conversations it is important to embrace the idea that we share common goals, dreams and narratives. We have to see each other as human beings who desire a place and an identity.¹⁴⁴ For example, Thomas Michel felt his mission was to follow the 1965 Vatican Council document *Nostra Aetate* which called for Christians to hold people of other faith traditions in high regard.¹⁴⁵ Through his experience, he recognized that we all agree that what we see is not all there is because God is still at work in the world. Michel says that sharing our stories allows us a fuller picture of God’s work.¹⁴⁶ Letty M. Russel writes that maybe a new way of seeing the three traditions is that each one offers an insight into that which has not been fully revealed.¹⁴⁷

Hagar’s narrative asks us to shift our gaze from the easy storyline to see the more complex story that rarely gets center stage. As we shift our gaze to the margins, we are challenged to see the full humanity of the character and offered opportunities to show compassion. While working in the church, I saw that ministry inside the church walls did

¹⁴³ Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott and Grant Macaskill, *Genesis and Christian Theology*, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Riet Bons-Storm, “A Place to Share: Some Thoughts about the Meaning of Territory and Boundaries in our Thinking about God and Humanity,” 152.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Michel, “Where to now? Ways forward for Interreligious Dialogue: Images of Abraham as Models of Interreligious Encounter,” *The Muslim World* 100 (October 2010): 530.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Michel, “Where to now? Ways forward for Interreligious Dialogue: Images of Abraham as Models of Interreligious Encounter,” 533-534.

¹⁴⁷ Letty M. Russell, “Children of Struggle,” in *Hagar, Sarah and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 191.

not reach people who considered themselves outsiders and that insiders rarely thought about how to include the outsider. Shifting my gaze to people outside the church walls, I created a project to include people from any or no religious background into a space that is safe enough to see and hear “the other.” This is the experience of a Satsang. Satsang Yoga allows me an opportunity to show compassion for those who are not typically included in a Christian sacred gathering. Satsang Yoga includes compassion practices of meditation and yoga to allow time for people to become open to using their own words to share their spiritual experiences while also seeing and hearing from those they might consider “the other.” Through this process, I kept Nancy Haught’s words close to my heart. “Strangers—the others whom we suspect, fear, distrust, dismiss, even damn—may be sacred. They may be living examples of holiness that we need to survive, even thrive in a world where violence aims to separate us and mire us all in despair. Strangers become our teachers if we are willing to pay attention.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Nancy Haught, *Sacred Strangers*, Kindle loc. 101.

Chapter 3

The Leadership Task

Henri Nouwen

“Our many conversations led me to the inner conviction that the words ‘You are my Beloved’ revealed the most intimate truth about all human beings, whether they belong to any particular tradition or not.”¹⁴⁹ Nouwen’s words in *Life of the Beloved* captures the intention of *From the Pew to the Mat*. In this book, Nouwen writes to a dear friend who is Jewish and describes himself as living a secular life disconnected from his faith tradition. He asks Nouwen to write a book for him that would connect the experience of the sacred within the secular world. In the end, Nouwen and Fred agreed that the project failed, but Nouwen’s writing offered an authentic expression of a Christian minister attempting to write to a secular audience about the spiritual life. Etched into the framework of his life and writing, Nouwen developed a path for Christian leaders to follow.

Many voices influenced Nouwen’s thoughts, writing and teaching on the spiritual life of the Christian.¹⁵⁰ The life and work of Thomas Merton affected Nouwen’s thoughts on the ministry task of Christian leadership. Nouwen’s heart connected to Merton’s deep devotion to God expressed through a life of saying “Yes” to God’s call, prayer, compassion. Merton and Nouwen’s career path took a similar turn away from a public life of scholarship and teaching towards a ministry of solitude.¹⁵¹ Merton’s eight years of solitude eventually led him deep into

¹⁴⁹ Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 30.

¹⁵⁰ Henri Nouwen, *Love in a Fearful Land: A Guatemalan Story* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 99.

¹⁵¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Encounters with Merton: Spiritual Reflections*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 21-23.

suffering. Through intense suffering, Merton discovered God, solidarity with all of humanity, and the desire for community.¹⁵² Throughout his life, Merton recognized that God sent people as gifts of love and as “signposts” to help lead him.¹⁵³

Father John Vesey served as a “signpost” for Nouwen. Father Vesey invited Nouwen to come and pray with his people in Santiago Atitlan after Vesey replaced Father Rother as priest.¹⁵⁴ Father Rother died a martyr three years prior to Father Vesey being appointed priest and Nouwen felt inspired by Rother’s legacy of saying “Yes” to God’s call to stay with the people in Guatemala even while kidnappings and killings threatened his life. Father Rother’s compassion spread through the community in his work to understand the people’s spiritual needs, malnutrition, illiteracy, and fear. As Nouwen’s trip came to an end, Father Vesey asked him to write about Father Rother. Father Vesey did not know that Nouwen had been unable to write for a year and a half.¹⁵⁵ Inspired by Rother and Vesey, Nouwen agreed to the project and his writing created “a new way of being in solidarity with the suffering people of Santiago Atitlan.”¹⁵⁶

Nouwen experienced times of heartbreak, writer’s block, and disorientation during his life and ministry. In shifting from University life to a life at L’Arche Daybreak, Nouwen struggled to understand God’s unconditional love apart from the praise and recognition he received through his writing, speaking, and teaching. While struggling to embrace his new ministry at L’Arche, a friendship ended that exposed Nouwen’s neediness. His devastation at the loss of this friendship opened the door for him to seek solitude and guidance to heal past and

¹⁵² Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Encounters with Merton*, 72-74.

¹⁵³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Encounters with Merton*, 57.

¹⁵⁴ Henri Nouwen, *Love in a Fearful Land*, 17.

¹⁵⁵ Henri Nouwen, *Love in a Fearful Land*, 122-123.

¹⁵⁶ Henri Nouwen, *Love in a Fearful Land*, 124.

present wounds. During this season, Nouwen was charged with Adam's daily self-care routine. Once Nouwen surrendered to the ministry of caring for Adam's body, Nouwen realized that Adam gave him the gift of becoming more present and attuned to seeing, hearing and observing a single human life. Adam gifted Nouwen with a ministry of presence. Through giving and receiving in his relationship with Adam, Nouwen learned that mutual giving was a mark of the Christian leadership.

Through Nouwen's interaction with Merton, Vesey, and Adam, a path of leadership emerged. Henri Nouwen expresses his leadership style through three words: compassion, yes, and gift. First, a leader develops compassion through time spent in solitude which gives birth to finding solidarity with all humanity. Solidarity cultivates the leader's ability to embody compassion. Self-compassion and compassion for the Other, naturally flow outward into action. Saying, "Yes," is the next step in the leadership task. Continually surrendering to God's call to go and be with the Other naturally develops the third step which is to see people as gifts from God. This path of Christian leadership provides a structure flexible to the unique personality, gifts, and challenges of the leader. Nouwen believed that the greatest task of Christian leadership is to help people live as authentically as Christ lived.¹⁵⁷

Compassion

Nouwen's ability to voice his need for unconditional love reaches deep into the basic human struggle. When he moved to L'Arche Daybreak, Nouwen experienced a severe depression related to a reorientation to this new ministry and a break in an intimate friendship.

¹⁵⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 99.

This great man who received accolades, traveled with many friends, and taught future leaders now cleaned and cared for a man who could not speak to him. This man who wrote about the love of God for all of humanity realized that he did not know this unconditional love. The downward movement of his career forced him to accept that he needed God's unconditional love to be made real now that he was not producing according to society's expectations. Nouwen traveled away from L'Arche Daybreak to spend time in solitude.

Jesus said, "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate."¹⁵⁸ Nouwen describes the Hebrew word for compassion, *rachamim*, to mean "a movement of the womb of God."¹⁵⁹ The question rises, "How do leaders develop the compassion that moves a person at the gut level?" To begin this journey, Nouwen sees solitude as "the furnace of transformation" where a leader confronts all the inner movements of the self.¹⁶⁰ Nouwen and Merton both experienced the "furnace of transformation." Merton's eight years of solitude at Gethsemani taught him that even in physical solitude there is no guarantee of silence in the mind.¹⁶¹ Nouwen builds on this idea to say that silence and solitude of heart can be found anywhere when the leader is ready to face and befriend the inner movements.¹⁶²

The leader is invited into solitude and silence. When first entering a time of solitude, the leader confronts all the inner movements: emotions, mental chatter, needs, longings, and wounds.¹⁶³ The solitude no longer feels quiet and the leader might be tempted to turn back to the

¹⁵⁸ Luke 6:36.

¹⁵⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Random House, 1989), 14.

¹⁶⁰ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 15.

¹⁶¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Encounters with Merton*, 65.

¹⁶² Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 37-38.

¹⁶³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1982), 38.

world of people, activities, and events.¹⁶⁴ These inner movements scream for attention when a leader does not take regular time to attend to their cries for help. By addressing the cries and offering self-compassion, the leader learns to be at home in this inner sanctuary. In this interior space, the leader finds a place to embrace the person God created them to be.¹⁶⁵ With self-compassion, the leader learns to embrace even the negative inner parts. Nouwen writes,

In solitude we realize that nothing human is alien to us, that the roots of all conflict, war, injustice, cruelty, hatred, jealousy, and envy are deeply anchored in our own heart. In solitude our heart of stone can be turned into a heart of flesh, a rebellious heart into a contrite heart, and a closed heart into a heart that can open itself to all suffering people in a gesture of solidarity.¹⁶⁶

In the depth of solitude, a leader cultivates a compassionate heart for their own suffering while accepting the gift of God's unconditional love. When self-compassion and God's love meet, the leader's life becomes fertile ground for experiencing solidarity with all humanity. Acknowledging personal suffering, the leader realizes that all humans suffer. Nouwen writes that the rise of solidarity within the leader has great healing power.¹⁶⁷ Solidarity in human suffering moves the leader from loneliness to hopefulness that healing is available for all people.¹⁶⁸

Nouwen writes, "For the minister is called to recognize the sufferings of his time in his own heart and make that recognition the starting point of his service."¹⁶⁹ Having spent time in the inner sanctuary, the leader responds by speaking about the struggle in their own heart, how they cultivated a change of heart, and offer their journey as a story of healing.¹⁷⁰ When the leader

¹⁶⁴ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 1.

¹⁶⁵ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 48.

¹⁶⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 25.

¹⁶⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift*, 32.

¹⁶⁸ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 92-94.

¹⁶⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, xvi.

¹⁷⁰ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 60.

offers personal stories to share the radical all-inclusive love of God against the systems that oppose this love, the words flow out of compassion for the suffering of all human beings.¹⁷¹ As it relates to the minister Nouwen writes that , “...through his articulation of God’s work within himself he can lead others out of confusion to clarification; through his compassion he can guide them out of the closed circuits of their in-groups to the wide world of humanity.”¹⁷² Sharing the leader’s path opens the door for people to engage in reflecting on their own life experience by turning inward in solitude, finding solidarity and reaching out in compassion.¹⁷³

A leader offers compassion to others and becomes a healer through listening. Nouwen writes that the leader offers hospitality to the speaker as a “healing power.” Hospitality “requires first of all that the host feel at home in his own house, and secondly that he create a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor.”¹⁷⁴ The leader creates a safe space for people to tell their own life experiences by suspending judgment and inviting shared confession. This space for community welcomes human beings without trying to change them.¹⁷⁵ As people witness the process of sharing life experiences, the community finds solidarity in suffering and hope that all people might find healing. The search for healing invites the participants into their own inward journey cultivating self-compassion and accepting God’s unconditional love. The pattern of solitude, solidarity, and compassion flows in an endless circle supporting the leader and nourishing the followers.

¹⁷¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 45-47.

¹⁷² Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 47.

¹⁷³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 39.

¹⁷⁴ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 89.

¹⁷⁵ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 96.

Continue saying Yes

Nouwen realized God called him to the priesthood at an early age. At the remarkable age of 6, he responded to God with his first “yes.”¹⁷⁶ His deep desire to follow God continued over the course of his life enabling him to say “Yes” to joining the army as an army chaplain instead of staying at the seminary,¹⁷⁷ to say “Yes” to traveling down to Guatemala to pray with Father Vesey,¹⁷⁸ and to say “Yes” to pastor a community of people with special abilities. He writes, “A man who prayerfully goes about his life is constantly ready to receive the breath of God, and to let his life be renewed and expanded. . . He stands upright, stretches out his hands and comes out of the corner, free to boldly stride through the world because he can move without fear.”¹⁷⁹

The leader’s time spent in silence develops the leader’s ability to distinguish God’s quiet voice from the loud voice of society and the constant complaints of the inner chatter of the mind.¹⁸⁰ Saying “Yes” is an act of obedience. The Latin root of obedience is *audire*, which means, “to hear.”¹⁸¹ The minister spends time in solitude centering on the Divine voice of love instead of being distracted by busyness.¹⁸² Nouwen learned from Merton’s writings that once the self is de-emphasized by releasing worries about actions, achievements, power, and spiritual ambitions, then the guiding light of God can lead.¹⁸³ When the outside stimulus grows quiet and the internal chaos resumes its natural peaceful state, the leader’s inner sanctuary is made ready for active listening waiting for the creative inspiration of the Divine. Active listening requires

¹⁷⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Can You Drink the Cup?* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁷⁷ Henri Nouwen, *Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 20.

¹⁷⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Love in a Fearful Land*, 17.

¹⁷⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 64.

¹⁸⁰ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 40.

¹⁸¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion*, 34.

¹⁸² Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 16-21.

¹⁸³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Encounters with Merton*, 126-128.

paying attention to the many voices to distinguish the different tone and volume of the voice of God. God's voice is quiet and undemanding unlike the loud inner chatter and demands of society. To explain his understanding of God's voice, Nouwen writes about the story of Elijah. In this story, God is not found in the Hurricane, the earthquake or the fire. God's voice is heard in the breeze.¹⁸⁴

The soft breeze of God's voice feels like a loving presence reminding the leader of their inherited identity given at creation.¹⁸⁵ The leader learns to identify that loving presence within the inner sanctuary.¹⁸⁶ Finding God's abundant unconditional love at the center of this inner sanctuary provides a compass to navigate decisions. Nouwen writes, "The deeper we enter into the house of God, the house whose language is prayer, the less dependent we are on the blame or praise of those who surround us, and the freer we are to let our whole being be filled with that first love."¹⁸⁷ The leader recognizes God's guidance through a deep feeling of love in the inner sanctuary while at the same time recognizing a move away from the loving presence when anger, fear, jealousy, self-rejection and comparison fill the space. The continued experience of this loving presence provides the basis for trust which allows the leader to say "Yes" to speaking and acting in the world without fear.¹⁸⁸

Nouwen wrote repeatedly about the Christian Sacred Text found in John 21: 15-19. In the text, Jesus asks his disciple Simon Peter three times, "Do you love me?"¹⁸⁹ Nouwen quotes these verses to remind the leader that in the course of the leader's journey, they will move from

¹⁸⁴ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 40.

¹⁸⁵ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 48.

¹⁸⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion*, 42.

¹⁸⁷ Henri Nouwen, *Peacework*, 36.

¹⁸⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Peacework*, 36.

¹⁸⁹ John 21:15-19 (NRSV).

action/independence to waiting/dependence. This is the spiritual journey of learning to trust God's voice.¹⁹⁰ Learning to listen takes time and patience because God's clock runs at a different speed. When the leader learns to suspend time by not giving time unnecessary governance, then listening turns into watchful readiness. In the time of watchful readiness when the leader surrenders to God's voice and God's time, the leader is open to new possibilities and creativity.¹⁹¹

Nouwen recognized that the leadership task would be to disentangle from societies attachment to successful outcomes when saying, "Yes" to God's creative guidance. He heard people say, "Yes" to God and then become bitter when they did not receive recognition or did not grow their ministry.¹⁹² He experienced the pain of attachment to achieving results when he moved from the University to L'Arche Daybreak. He wrestled with knowing that God called him to explore the hidden truths found in downward mobility by turning inward to discover his own desire for praise. From this experience, he learned that the leader must extend care and compassion recognizing that expectations and attachments to success bring suffering. A shift in leadership energy occurs when the leader learns to recognize the pull of desire to please the world through achievements and turns the attention back to the simple task of listening to the loving presence and following. Success to the Christian leader is found in the moment of saying "Yes."¹⁹³ Nouwen writes, "Rather, we see in these actions a divine listening to a divine love, a loving response to a loving mission and a free "yes" to a free command."¹⁹⁴ The Christian leader

¹⁹⁰ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift*, 92.

¹⁹¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *A Letter of Consolation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982), 50-53.

¹⁹² Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion*, 59.

¹⁹³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion*, 29.

¹⁹⁴ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion*, 35.

follows Jesus and Jesus' "Yes" to God in being with us in our pain and suffering while embodying a hopeful message that love always wins.¹⁹⁵

Gift

Henri Nouwen recognized a need for ministers to look at people as a gift to the leader from God. In Nouwen's travels, he observed desperately needy people who offered him gifts of love and community despite their abject poverty.¹⁹⁶ Christian leaders forget that Jesus lives among the least in our world offering gifts that the greatest resist because leaders feel overwhelmed at their own powerlessness to fix the people's situation.¹⁹⁷ Once a leader embraces each person as a gift, the leader shifts energy from needing to solve the people's problems to being among the people to celebrate and share in sorrows. Nouwen's ministry to the differently abled community at L'Arche confirmed that all people offer gifts to the world.

American culture elevates uniqueness and being special over interconnectedness creating comparison and competition that drive people apart. When a leader no longer needs to be special or unique, the leader becomes open to seeing each person as a gift¹⁹⁸ believing that Jesus lives on in each person that the leader meets.¹⁹⁹ As God draws people around the leader, the leadership task is to welcome them as gifts from God. Typically, leaders feel sent to a community because they embody gifts to help the community. Nouwen agrees that ministers share gifts with the community and adds that God sends a leader to a community because God desires to give a gift

¹⁹⁵ Henri Nouwen, *Peacework*, 68-81.

¹⁹⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Letters to Marc about Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), chapter 4.

¹⁹⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *LifeSigns: Intimacy, Fecundity and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 77.

¹⁹⁸ Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion*, 77-78.

¹⁹⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *A Letter of Consolation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982), 26.

to the leader through the community.²⁰⁰ Nouwen experienced Adam as a gift from God when he moved to L'Arche Daybreak. The community and the many guests who visited L'Arche Dayspring recognized that Adam embodied the gift of presence. His presence "offered those he met a presence and a safe place to recognize and accept their own, often invisible disabilities."²⁰¹ Nouwen felt God gifted him with Adam's presence to learn two profound lessons. First, Nouwen recognized his own disabilities and the need to accept care from others who would provide a space for healing. Second, Nouwen experienced that the only way to care for people who are full of dependence, vulnerability and suffering is to share ministry.

Nouwen's favorite passage in writing about the gift of Jesus' death is John 12:24. "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."²⁰² Receiving a gift requires a leader to stand with arms extended out. This body posture feels unprotected and vulnerable. It is a posture of opening the body to receive which is less powerful than the posture of giving. This opening in the leader's life creates an overwhelming need to give back so that the relationship remains balanced, equal, and comfortable. Nouwen challenges the leader to stay in the uncomfortable and vulnerable posture of the recipient.²⁰³ In this vulnerable stance, the leader dies to the old ways of being fiercely independent in ministry.²⁰⁴ Death of the old ways that gave rise to loneliness makes space for the new life of ministry as shared ministry.

²⁰⁰ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *LifeSigns*, 50-70.

²⁰¹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Adam: God's Beloved* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 64.

²⁰² John 12:24 (NRSV).

²⁰³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 62-64.

²⁰⁴ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 61.

Conclusions

The leader's mission is to hold space for love to flow back and forth, in and out, around and within the community. Working in community, leaders energetically shift their sense of ministry from independent ministry to dependence on the community to meet the needs of community members. The leader expresses gratitude for the complementary gifts found in community recognizing that the leader's ministry thrives when other people's gifts enhance the leader's gifts.²⁰⁵ Without shared ministry, the weight of ministry leads individuals to loneliness and despair. Individuals who carry the weight for the community find themselves wrapped up in only caring for the needs within the community without looking out to care for needs in the larger community.²⁰⁶ Nouwen holds out the ideal that a community is a inward place of safety and a place of challenge to go out and liberate.²⁰⁷ Nouwen writes, "Community cannot, then grow out of loneliness, but comes when the person who begins to recognize his or her belovedness greets the belovedness of the other. The God alive in me greets the God resident in you."²⁰⁸

The leader hopes to create a safe place for all people to enter and learn how to live as authentically as Christ lived his life, but the leader must walk the path before inviting other people onto the path.²⁰⁹ The leadership path is not a means to develop the same skills in uniquely different individuals. For Nouwen envisioned a way for each person to return to themselves as

²⁰⁵ Henri Nouwen, *Peacework*, 116-117.

²⁰⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift*, 60-65.

²⁰⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2007), 106.

²⁰⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Turn My Mourning into Dancing: Finding Hope in Hard Times*, ed. Timothy Jones (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 83.

²⁰⁹ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 99.

the beloved celebrating their uniqueness and sameness within community. The path to find this love winds through the words compassion, yes, and gift.

Chapter 4

Research Project

Methodology

I began this project to offer yoga students from any or no religious background a sacred gathering (or Satsang) for the purpose of seeking truth through dialogue using Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*. Satsang Yoga includes meditation, yoga asanas, a reading of a sacred text, and facilitated dialogue for the purpose of engaging students in a spiritual experience. The research project was designed as qualitative research in which I was a participant and an observer.

The project's two goals guided the gathering of data for this project:

- i) to explore truths found in Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved* and
- ii) to explore the use of Satsang Yoga for sacred gatherings of persons of diverse religious backgrounds

People from many religious traditions or those who claim no tradition in their background practice yoga because of the benefits of reducing stress and promoting inner clarity. Yoga is a contemplative practice beyond adherence to one religion because the practice brings greater awareness and a compassionate quality to the practitioner's body, breath, mind, and

spirit.²¹⁰ Complex emotions stored in the body find a way to release and relax. As the body releases and expands, the mind begins to open to new ways of thinking. Eddie Stern in *One Simple Thing* wrote, “when we decide that we need to look at our lives through a new lens, moving our bodies into new shapes will help to change our perspective on ourselves and life because we are directly using our bodies to influence the way we process incoming information; our worldview can easily be altered by putting ourselves into postures.”²¹¹ In this relaxed and open state, the yoga student is invited into the experience of speaking and listening during the dialogue. When speech and listening are examined closely like a yoga student observes the body and the breath, then they too become spiritual practices.²¹²

Hagar’s story told from the pew engages the listener’s mind and spirit while the story told from the mat harnesses the transformative power of the mind, body, and spirit. Eddie Stern writes, “expansion naturally follows release. Automatically compassion, empathy, understanding, and forgiveness express themselves in us, because they are the traits of a mind that is not self-centered around an individual body; they allow us to become more connected to the world and people around us.”²¹³ Satsang Yoga’s practice flows from yoga postures to dialogue capturing the yoga students in the moment of expansion to engage in dialogue with other students around the sacred text. The transformation the yoga students experience continues to flourish while they engage in a new way of speaking about their experience of the Divine and listening to other students’ stories.

²¹⁰ Eddie Stern, *One Simple Thing*, 210.

²¹¹ Eddie Stern, *One Simple Thing*, 34.

²¹² Judith Hanson Lasater and Ike K. Lasater, *What We Say Matters*, 19.

²¹³ Eddie Stern, *One Simple Thing*, 144.

Compassion represents a new way of being in this world. Nouwen recommends that compassion be a way of life for the leader so that space is created within the heart of the leader to welcome the other. To embody this principle in *From the Pew to the Mat*, the principle investigator practiced loving kindness meditation and the Yahweh breath practice.²¹⁴ The loving kindness meditation invites the practitioner to extend compassion to inward before extending compassion to a loved one, a stranger, and a challenging person. The principle investigator spent time each day practicing this style of meditation focusing on the group forming at the University of Houston and those that would gather at the retreat setting. The Yahweh breath provided a tool for visualizing being filled with the spirit of the great Christian teacher, Jesus. The inhale fills the body with love and compassion and the exhale fills the room with love and compassion.

In thinking about the role of the leader in this new space, the principle investigator used Larry Dressler's book, *Standing in the Fire: Leading High-Heat Meetings with Clarity, Calm and Courage* to help craft written statements to read before each project meeting.²¹⁵ These statements are affirmations of the principle investigator's role in the space that allows the participants to have the freedom to explore this new practice. The pre-meeting activities found in chapter 10: Prepare to Lead guided the process (see Appendix 5).

The ability to say "Yes" describes a new way of hearing and seeing the guidance of God. The principle investigator felt like she followed a trail of breadcrumbs on a long and windy road during *From the Pew to the Mat*. Using Nouwen's leadership principles, the principle investigator learned to trust inner wisdom, to allow the research to shine a light on the path, and to observe the intended audience for clues as to what would be most meaningful to them.

²¹⁴ Frank Rogers Jr, *Compassion in Practice: The Way of Jesus* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2016), 52.

²¹⁵ Larry Dressler, *Standing in the Fire: Leading High-Heat Meetings with Clarity, Calm and Courage* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2010), 141-142.

Nouwen's theme "Yes" reminded the principle investigator to continue saying "Yes" when obstacles appeared and the way forward was unclear and to say "Yes" when observing patterns of self-doubt. The greatest impact Nouwen's theme "Yes" offered the principle investigator was the shift away from focusing on the number of people participating to seeing each participant as a gift to this project.

The leader engages in a new way of seeing when each person is considered a gift of love from God. The unique setting at the University of Houston enabled the project to be open to anyone participating. Flyers on campus invited the students to participate for one or all five of the classes. Preparing for this setting, the principle investigator embraced Nouwen's idea that God is drawing people to the project while opening the leader's heart to receive each participant as a gift. The retreat setting provided another opportunity to receive God's gift through each participant. The principle investigator chose these participants by listening to her inner wisdom, saying "Yes" to the guidance received, and preparing to receive these friends as gifts from God.

Participants

The project took two different forms: a one-day retreat and five consecutive one hour practices. The one-day retreat gathered yoga students from the Kingwood, Texas area. After securing a retreat site, the owners of the retreat center asked if they could participate in the project, so the project expanded to include these two participants. Participants were met with individually to talk about the basic premise of the project and invite them to recommend other participants for the project. After the potential team formed, the participants were invited to meet as a group to fill out consent forms, explain the project in detail including the deadlines for

reading Nouwen's book and filling out the questions. The participants' answers would direct the creation of dialogue questions for the retreat (see Appendix 4 and 9).

The second format would take place at the University of Houston. United Campus Ministries hosted the project welcoming the presence of yoga for the entire 2018-2019 school year. This was the first time UCM offered yoga on the University of Houston campus. Most of the year, the format taught was Yoga and Sacred Text similar in style to YoWo, Holy Yoga, and Yoga Chaplain, while Satsang Yoga was developing. By February 2019, the students began receiving information about Satsang Yoga through verbal invitation, emails, text messages, Facebook posts, and printed flyers (See Appendix 1). The participants at the University of Houston were given consent forms and detailed explanation of the project two weeks before the project began.

Preparation

The participants for the retreat format were asked to read Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved* and answer questions after each chapter (see Appendix 4). Two weeks before the retreat, the participants sent the principle investigator their responses so questions could be created for the facilitated dialogue portion of Satsang Yoga Retreat. The participants at the University of Houston were not required to read the book before the five-week gathering. The University of Houston participants were given the opportunity to read the book after the Satsang Yoga format began.

Retreat

The retreat was held on April 6th from 1-6pm at the Faith and Wellness Retreat Center in Waller, Texas. The retreat format followed the same format as the format for the one-hour practice at the University of Houston: meditation, yoga, meditation, facilitated dialogue, and meditation. Each element expanded proportionately to fill five hours (see Appendix 10). The group began with compassion practices of yoga and meditation. The breath awareness meditation flowed into asana practices that included a fun community building element in the middle complete with wearing party hats and celebratory music. The music during the Satsang intentionally spoke about claiming our right to be here, seeing each person, and love. (For a complete playlist see Appendix 6). During the asanas, the message focused on the essence of Satsang as explained by Sally Kempton. She describes Satsang as a gathering to unmask truth, to see each participant's inherent goodness, and to hear from each person as if God, light, love, creative power is speaking (see Appendix 7).

Before the dialogue, the participants engaged in a loving-kindness meditation to begin the process of sending loving kindness out to those within our group and beyond our gathering. After the meditation, the group gathered to begin dialogue. The participants went over the communication agreements and structure for the dialogue before beginning with the first question (see Appendix 8). After the dialogue, the participants ended the gathering with breath meditation and filling out the feedback forms. The group celebrated after the retreat with a meal provided by the host facility.

5 Sessions at the University of Houston

The group at the University of Houston met for five weeks with each participant having the freedom to participate in the number of sessions that worked best with their schedule. Each week, the facilitator lead through the one-hour Satsang format: meditation, yoga, meditation, facilitated dialogue, and meditation (see Appendix 10). At the end of the fifth week, the group participated in a ninety-minute format to include a celebration of the project and the year of yoga with United Campus Ministries. The meeting took place in the upstairs chapel at the A.D. Bruce Religion Center at 11:30am on Tuesdays in April 2019.

The multi-session dialogue provided opportunity for feedback that allows the participants to have input in the creation of the Satsang Yoga format. At the end of each session, the participants filled out feedback forms that asked what was most satisfying, least satisfying, changes to make the format work for their needs, and learning opportunities while engaged in Satsang (see Appendix 11). Each week, the facilitator recorded the responses and adjusted the format or questions for the following meeting. The sessions allowed time to explore one theme in Nouwen's book each week. The one-hour duration of the session limited the number of questions and depth of the questions.

Data Analyzing

The investigator served as yoga teacher, meditation guide and dialogue facilitator for this project. The project's two goals guided the gathering of data during the project.

- (i) to explore truth found in Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved* and
- (ii) to explore the use of Satsang Yoga for interreligious sacred gatherings.

At every Satsang Yoga, the participants were asked to provide personal information regarding age, gender, religious background, and current spiritual practice. The retreat group read Nouwen's book and submitted responses to questions asked about each chapter. The feedback was used to write questions for the dialogue part of the retreat. At the retreat and University of Houston Satsangs, the dialogue facilitator wrote the participant's answers to the questions as they spoke with the group. This data was typed up and the investigator began the process of coding while looking for words and themes to consider in looking for the collected truth found in Nouwen's writing. The investigator inserted the data into Pro Word Cloud to see if words and themes matched or enhanced the coding process. The codes were also inserted into Pro Word Cloud to analyze the prominence of words and themes.

The feedback forms helped during the five-week meetings to find the overall words to describe the experience of Satsang Yoga and note the benefits of participating in the experience (see Appendix 11). Each week, the participants were given the opportunity to fill out feedback forms. The facilitator consulted the forms each week to determine aspects of the format that needed changing for the following meeting. At the end of the retreat and on week five, the participants filled out a final feedback form. The investigator coded the responses and created word clouds through Pro Word Cloud to assess prominent words found in each question of the feedback form noting words that connected in categories. This helps the investigator understand the experience of the participants by using their own words.

Discussion of Results

The University of Houston Setting

Demographics

Each Satsang Yoga gathering, the participants filled out forms that asked them to give the best description of themselves. The questionnaire offered the participants an opportunity to give their age range, gender, information about their religious background, and current spiritual practices. The participants filled out a demographic form at each gathering because the project was open to any person on the University of Houston campus and they were invited to attend as many gatherings as possible. The participants were given the freedom to participate when attendance was possible. The gatherings were designed as individual projects not dependent on every participant attending all five gatherings. Most of the participants practiced yoga with the principle investigator before joining the project, but a few joined the group for the project because of seeing a flyer or being invited by another participant. The charts and graphs below give a glimpse into the demographics of the group that gathered throughout the five weeks.

Thirty-eight individuals participated in Satsang Yoga over five weeks with an average of 8 participants at each gathering. At the final gathering, eight participants recorded the number of Satsang Yoga practices they attended. Five participants wrote that they attended four of the Satsang Yoga practices. Two participants attended all five of the project gatherings while one participant attended two. The eight participants who filled out the final feedback form averaged attending four out of the five sessions. With the exception of the 50-59 years category,

participants were in every age group from 18-24 to 60-69. Approximately three times as many females participated as males.

The participants had the freedom to check as many answers as best describes the history of their experience in religious traditions. Figure 4.1 shows the traditions represented by the group according to the number of total responses given. Thirty-eight total participants gave sixty-seven responses with one participant leaving the form blank. Out of the sixty-seven recorded responses, 45% of the responses designated Christianity in their religious background. Buddhist represent 15% of the responses while 9% of the responses claimed a connection with the Hindu tradition. Jehovah's Witness accounted for 7% while 6% percent of the responses reported a connection to Judaism. The Other category fell at 18% of total responses. The participants wrote spiritual, agnostic, none, and no religious background next to the Other category.

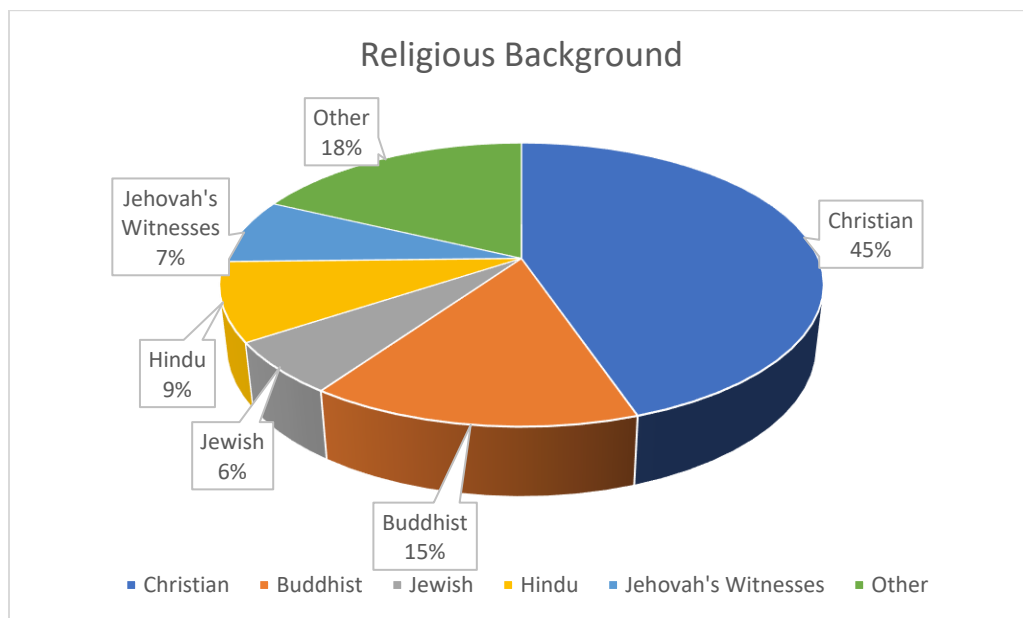


Figure 4.1 Religious Background of Participants at the University of Houston

Some of the demographic forms showed participants choosing multiple religious traditions in their background see Figure 4.2. Of the thirty-eight forms, twenty-two listed only one tradition in their religious background accounting for 58% of the responses. Five respondents (13%) listed two traditions in their religious background and five respondents (13%) listed three traditions in their background. Lastly, four or more traditions in their religious background accounted for 10% of the responses and one response was left blank. The data shows that 36% of the participants have two or more traditions in their religious background. The results may show that more people think of their religious background as a singular experience or have only experienced one tradition. Others may appreciate the opportunity to record the experiences of multiple traditions in their background. The participants that record more than one may also have had significant experience in more than one tradition.

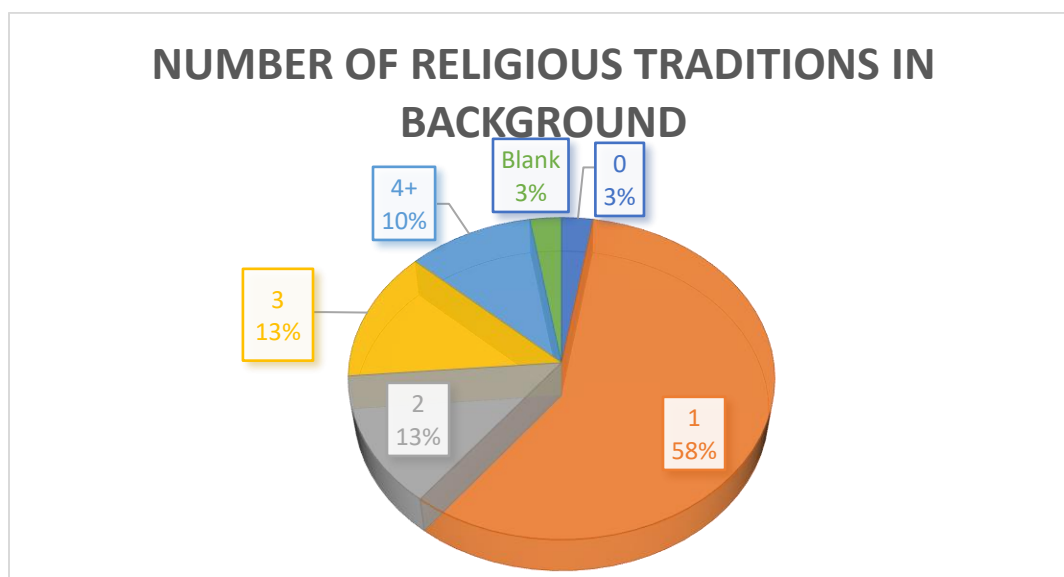


Figure 4.2 Number of Religious Traditions Practiced by Participants at the University of Houston

The participants were asked if they were still participating in the religious tradition they marked as their religious background. Forty-seven percent of the responses recorded no longer practicing their tradition. Twenty-six percent continued practicing and 24% practiced a blend of

religious traditions. The blank form totaled 3% of total responses. Of the participants who claimed one only tradition in their religious background, 30% circled that they are currently practicing that tradition, 57% are no longer practicing, 9% are blending, and 4% left the answer blank. The data for participants who recorded their religious background with Christianity as their only tradition showed that 62% no longer practice, 29% currently practice Christianity, 9% blend traditions. The data for participants who marked two or more religious traditions in their background stated that 21% continued to practice, 29% percent no longer practiced, and 50% practice a blend of traditions.

The questionnaire gave the participants the opportunity to check the boxes that best describes their current spiritual practice. The thirty-eight participants gave 120 responses with one form left blank. The Figure 4.3 gives you percentages based on the total number of responses. The participants who gathered for the project shared an interest in yoga, so Yoga/Tai Chi topped the list as 28% of the responses while prayer/meditation/contemplation totaled 22% of the responses and 12% of the responses were for reading sacred texts. More than half of the responses given were for the spiritual practices included in the project: yoga, meditation, and reading sacred text. Art or creative expression totaled 11% of the responses and Giving/Serving totaled 8%. Church and Sacred Gatherings totaled 7% of the responses respectively.



Figure 4.3 Spiritual Practices of Univ. of Houston Participants

Dialogue Themes

The principle investigator looked at the participants responses to Nouwen's words and to the what the participants gained through the experience of Satsang Yoga. While Christian in nature, Nouwen attempted to write to a wider audience of people who he described as living a secular life. Nouwen and the friend who inspired the book found the book did not connect to his intended audience and so this project created a space for people from any or no religious background inclusive of Nouwen's intended audience to reflect on how his words did or did not resonate with their life experience. The second focus of the project was to see the effects of participation in Satsang Yoga.

Participants considered and responded to Nouwen's five main themes: Beloved, Taken, Blessed, Broken, and Given. The participants noted that words have a feeling tone. Words can feel inclusive or exclusive. Words can embody positive or negative energy from how the words have been used in the past. Words have a history. It seemed that by beginning the dialogue with inviting the participants to remember and share a story about each theme, a sense that every person shares in the experience created a solid foundation of solidarity. For example, Nouwen's

Taken/Chosen theme felt exclusive to the group, but was softened by offering the participants a chance to share a story about being chosen for a team, job, committee or an award. After the sharing of personal stories that connected to this theme, most of the participants still felt the word Taken/Chosen was exclusive and not appropriate, but acknowledged that everyone has an experience of being chosen which made the feeling tone of the exclusive words more positive and inclusive.

Words have a history that must be acknowledged and words have a future through dialogue with people who have different perspectives. The dialogue served as an invitation for the participants to share their life stories and to consider Nouwen's view of the spiritual aspect of the theme. For example, the theme of blessing asked the participants to share a story about a time when they experienced being given a formal or informal blessing. The principle investigator defined a formal blessing as a special occasion where there was awareness around the blessing or when a blessing was expected by a respected person. An informal blessing was defined as an unexpected time when words, gifts, or time was offered and upon later reflection the impact was noted. The participants share a wide variety of stories of blessings from aunts, mothers, sons, and granddaughters. Many stories were shared about how words, prayers, invitations to new experiences and being adopted were blessings. Stories were also shared about simple things like waking up and eye contact with another person is a blessing. After the participants shared their stories, they responded that their personal definition of blessing was expanded through the dialogue. The participants recognized that listening with openness to being changed by the other person's words invited them to shape a new or more expansive definition.

The use of metaphor spoke in the most positive way to the participants as a group. The first week, the group heard Nouwen's words, "I have been doing a lot of digging lately and I

know that I am just beginning to see a little stream bubbling up through the dry sand. I have to keep digging because that little stream comes from a huge reservoir beneath the desert of my life...Perhaps all we need to do is remove the dry sand that covers the well.”²¹⁶ In reacting to the image of the well as metaphor, participants observed that it resonated with their experience of spirituality. One participant noted that the metaphor resonated with her experience of her yoga practice in that the practice gave her a path to be aware of the well by speaking positively in her internal dialogue. Another participant offered her own awareness to negative experiences with religious people covering her well. Two participants offered the perspective that listening to others and learning new things continues to uncover the well. A participant from no religious background understood the metaphor to mean that all human beings desire to be good, but each person goes about it differently. The offering of the metaphor seemed to inspire unique perspectives on spirituality with the common thread being that every human being is on a spiritual journey to embody virtues consistent with their faith tradition or moral standards.

Experience

The Satsang Yoga experience offered the participants multiple ways to prepare themselves for listening to Henri Nouwen and engaging in dialogue. The yoga asana practice invited the participants to release tension in their bodies while strengthening and stretching. The asana practice empowers the students to know themselves at a deeper level, to move in ways that feel good to their bodies, and to honor limitations. The meditation helps the participants shift away from fear and into a calmer, steady state. Even the dialogue that included structure and

²¹⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 37-38.

communication agreements provided a way for the participants to feel safe enough to contribute. Four themes emerged from observations as well as responses from the participants.

First, the participants commented that they felt positive energy in the group. Asking each person to begin by sharing a personal story resulted in smiles, giggles, and a continued softening of the participants' bodies. The intention of putting this question first gave the results needed to continue conversation in a positive manner. In week one, one participant mentioned that the gathering was a safe space noting that everyone felt open to sharing from their experience. In week two, the words offered by Nouwen challenged the positive nature of the group, yet the participants commented that they were grateful that the group focused on trying to be inclusive of all people. Week four and five, a participant commented that finding this group gave him hope for the world. In our final gathering, one participant reflected that she felt she would not have been as open to sharing her life stories with others had we not practiced yoga together before the dialogue.

Second, the dialogue provided opportunity to reflect on words and the experience offered an invitation to reflect beyond words. The participants became aware that words have meaning and a feeling, but that communication includes more than words spoken and words heard. The insight gleaned from week three included reflections on the inner dialogue of the person receiving a blessing. Comments were made about self-criticism, judgement, and internal conflict affecting the receiver's ability to receive a blessing. In week two, the synergy of the group emerged when several people shared this insight, "You choose to be chosen." The deeper internal work was understood by the group as a prerequisite to become aware, uncover, express and engage in what it means to be chosen.

Third, the participants recognized an intentionality that must be cultivated to fully engage in the experience of communication. In week three, the participants recognized a need to be present to receive a blessing. The busy lives of the participants and the internal critical dialogue results in the participants brushing off blessings or not even recognizing the blessings all around them. Also, week three revealed that the participants experienced feeling the intention of the speaker whether authentic or inauthentic. When the participants discussed their brokenness in week four, one participant noted that she ignores her brokenness and that in Satsang Yoga, she was able to look at her brokenness. In week five, a participant commented that setting an intention for the day encourages them to live out Nouwen's theme of being given to the world.

Fourth, the idea emerged that listening is a gift to the speaker and to the listener. Through the process of listening, the participants grew in their awareness of their similarities while appreciating their differences. Week one ended with an awareness and celebration of the participant's different perspectives. Many comments were made sharing gratitude for each person's openness to sharing their perspective. In week two, one participant shared that the insight she received from the dialogue was that each person had an experience of being chosen that impacted their life. Week three's dialogue about blessing prompted one participant to share that the gift they received from the dialogue was the idea that there is universal truth that connects all people. The theme of brokenness centered our discussion in week four. While the participants listened to the stories shared, the participants remarked that human beings experience suffering, but how each person experiences and engages the suffering is unique to that person. Even if two participants shared a similar experience, each person felt the experience of brokenness differently.

Community

The community created through the project brought together participants from many age ranges and religious backgrounds. Most of the participants practiced yoga together for several months before joining the Satsang Yoga project. A few of the participants worked together on campus for many years. One participant commented that she had worked with another participant for three years, but had never heard him speak as many words as he did during the project. By the fifth week of the project, the participants felt a sense of community through feeling safe, encouraged, and included.

The Satsang Yoga format included a sense of risk; the risk of being vulnerable. The participants acknowledged this shared sense of risk by offering encouragement to the group even in the first week of the project. During the gifts and insights portion of the dialogue, they offered gratitude for each participant's openness to sharing their stories and insights. The participants began commenting in week two that the safe space encouraged them to speak their truth. In week three, the collective agreement of the participants is that they sense the intention of the speaker. The participants reflected that trusting another person means sensing a good intention from the person and that they need to be ready to receive. Another risk the participants sensed involved listening to the other person with an intention to create a new or expand an old way of seeing. They reflected that the group felt open to sharing and listening. This openness allowed participants to include other people's way of seeing things into their own perspective.

The community created through Satsang Yoga elevated inclusion as the highest priority. The format and dialogue questions were designed to be as inclusive as possible for any participant that might attend. The participants reflected an appreciation for the inclusive nature of the questions and the tone that was set. Week two displayed the group's priority for including

others because the theme for the week threatened to be exclusive. Many comments during the gifts and insights reflected how much effort the group exerted in trying to make the theme feel inclusive. Week three reflected their engagement in being inclusive by the participants ability to see their definition of blessing expand to include other participants definitions. In week four, the discussion of brokenness unveiled that each participant experienced brokenness. The theme of given in week five added the idea that each participant is also a gift to the world. The participants shared connected stories of suffering and stories of being given. The group embraced differences by receiving each participant's engagement with their suffering and their gifts to offer the world.

Feedback Forms from the University of Houston

In the first four weeks of the project at the University of Houston, the participants filled out the same feedback form. The feedback form asked the participants to reflect on the full experience of Satsang Yoga. The first question asked the participants to share in their own words what was most satisfying or valuable about the experience. Figure 4.8 reveals what the participants found most satisfying about Satsang Yoga. Four weeks of responses were coded and a word cloud was created. The larger words represent words repeated more often in the recorded responses down to the smallest font representing words least often recorded.



Figure 4.4 Most Satisfying elements of Satsang Yoga by Univ. of Houston Participants

The words that stand out the most in the word cloud include sharing, others, dialogue, experiences, listen and opening. The theme from these words revolves around the experience of the dialogue. First, the gathering of people from different ages, religious backgrounds, and experiences created an environment where the group could hear from different perspectives. Second, the format of beginning with yoga and meditation seemed to provide a way for this diverse group to be open to sharing their life experiences in a way that was meaningful to both the speaker and the listener. Third, the group participated in the sharing and listening with only one person not participating in any of the dialogue. The participants felt everyone was included in the process while honoring the individual who was not ready to participate.

The second layer of most used words included yoga, different, sense, similar, hearing, listening, and perspectives. These words give a sense that the group enjoyed hearing each participant's life story. Through their listening, they began to see that the participants share similarities and different. The beginning question in the dialogue asked the participants to think about the theme for the week in a way that reflected their life stories. This earthy way of grounding the theme in life stories allowed the participants an opportunity to share a part of their life story with the group while linking their story to the theme for the week from Nouwen's book. The participants' stories proved to connect the group in a way that where similarities could be appreciated and differences understood.

The second question on the feedback form asked the participants to share what was least satisfying about their experience of Satsang Yoga. The third question asked the participants to offer suggestions to altering the Satsang Yoga format. The results were used to alter the Satsang Yoga format. One person was aware that they mentally and emotionally disengaged when another participant made a comment that made their religion sound superior. The commitments of the group that are read at the beginning of the dialogue addresses this issue, but could be stated more plainly. One feedback form shared how not having the text to see while the principle investigator read the text proved difficult to understand the meaning of the text. A handful of responses hoped to see more yoga, more meditation, more dialogue, the need for tissues, and the recommendation to warm the meeting room.

The final feedback form question allowed the participants an opportunity to reflect on what they learned about themselves during Satsang Yoga. Figure 4.5 is a word cloud using the responses given over the four-week period. The responses fall into six categories: I am statements, benefits, words, expansion, inclusion, and wounds. First, many people wrote "I am"

statements that included spiritual, unique, blessed, a part of the chosen people, open, honest, and unique in my brokenness. Second, the participants wrote about the benefits that they experienced through the format. This included experiencing positive energy after the practice, the ability to breathe better and the reminder to breathe, that group meditation is powerful and a compliment to personal practice, and that this group provides an opportunity to share personal spiritual experiences.

These last four categories reflect the Satsang gatherings offering the participants an opportunity to explore how their own perspective could be shaped by hearing the stories of the other participants. The third category focuses on words. The participants understood more fully that words matter, words make a difference, and that there are positive and negative connotations to words. Fourth, the participants experienced an expansion of former ways of seeing things. Listening to stories of what other people view as blessings expanded their way of understanding the spectrum of blessings in their own lives. A few comments mentioned that participants began seeing their spiritual life or inner life in a new way. Fifth, the feeling of inclusion emerged through the comments. One participant wrote that they felt that there are many people on the same path. Another participant wrote that Henri Nouwen's book offered metaphors that felt inclusive so that everyone could express their views. Sixth, Satsang Yoga uncovered areas in the participant's lives that needed attention or healing. The feedback reported the need to address areas of brokenness instead of ignoring them and to accept emotions that display as tears. Many participants saw the need to open themselves more to accept the others in the group and to share with the group more of themselves. Twice a comment was made about recognizing issues with religion.

structure of Satsang Yoga provided a way for each participant to begin by loosening their tight body and connecting to a source of inner peace during meditation. The participants felt prepared to engage in the dialogue after engaging in these two elements. Then, the most reported element that created safety was the facilitator setting the rules and agreements at the beginning of each dialogue. The responses mentioned commitment to confidentiality, turn taking followed by silence, fairness of each participant having the same amount of time and the communication agreements

Next, the participants answered questions about the value of the Satsang Yoga experience to determine if the practice should be repeated as a new way of creating community. Each participant was given the opportunity to respond if they would continue to participate in Satsang yoga if it was held on campus, off campus, cost no money, and cost between five and seven dollars. All eight participants responded that they would participate in Satsang Yoga if it was hosted on campus and cost no money. Several participants had other suggestions about making the experience donation based, creating a membership system, and making it free to those who can't afford participation.

The final feedback question asked the participants to note what changes they observed in themselves as a result of participation in the Satsang experience. Presence was the primary theme that emerged from the eight responses. Satsang Yoga created a space where the participants felt present to themselves and to the other participants. The responses reflected that one participant became aware of old issues with religion while another realized patterns of negative thoughts. One participant noted a feeling of calm and an observation that this experience allowed the participant to be more welcoming of others while another participant wrote about experiencing self-love again through taking care of mind and body. Another

participant wrote about being more emotionally vulnerable noticing when feelings arise and letting them come. A participant wrote about a deeper connection to the breath and another participant wrote about a deeper connection to the community.

Retreat Center Satsang Yoga

The retreat center gathered five participants. The demographics of this group included one male and four females who are between the ages of forty and sixty-nine. Two individuals reported being in their forties and two reported being in their fifties while one circled the sixties age range. Next, the participants checked all the religious traditions in their background. This group only listed one tradition for each person with Christians representing 60%, 20% marked Jewish, and 20% wrote in “human on a spiritual journey.” Lastly, the participants were asked if they still practiced the religious tradition they marked previously. The responses divided equally at 40% stating that they continued to practice and 40% stating that they no longer practice their religious tradition while 20% practice a blend of traditions.

The participants were asked to record their current spiritual practices. Figure 4.6 shows the percentage of responses. The top responses included yoga, art, prayer, and giving at 16% of the responses respectively. Reading sacred text followed at 12% and participation in sacred gathering totaled 12%. Retreats and faith events were listed as sacred gatherings. Church attendance accounted for 4% of the total responses while Other held 8% of the responses. The Other category included participants suggesting other spiritual practices for example just being me and “living in a way that reaffirms all of the above.”

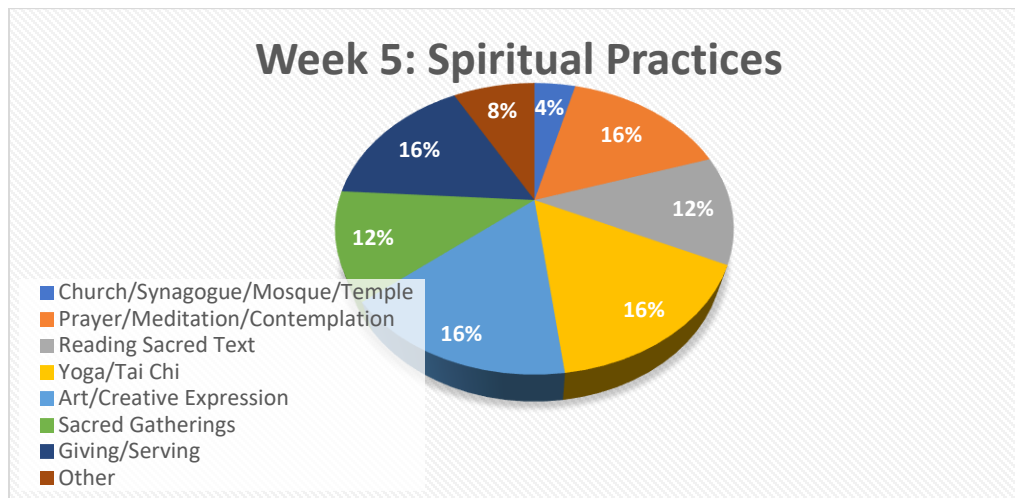


Figure 4.6 Spiritual Practices of Retreat Center Participants

Retreat Center Dialogue

The first question of the retreat dialogue asked the participants to reflect on a special name they are called by a loved one or a special name they have for a loved one. The group enjoyed this light-hearted question. There was a noticeable shift in energy from tension to more relaxed as the participants smiled and laughed with each other. The second question asked the participants to think about what theme, quote, or word most resonated with them and then asked how Nouwen missed the mark with his words and themes. The following ideas resonated with the participants: the spiritual life is a journey of becoming, that each person is given to the world as a gift, and that blessings are powerful. All five participants stated that Nouwen failed because of his choice to wrap the book in the metaphor of communion. Communion is an exclusive Christian practice that only those who have participated in some way in the past could possibly resonate with while reading Nouwen's book. They felt a disconnect from his intention to be inclusive while structuring the entire book in an exclusively Christian practice.

The third question asked the participants to spend time brainstorming the assumptions they felt Nouwen made while writing to a secular audience. Then, the participants were to describe the energetic shifts from resistance to openness they felt while reading the book. The brainstorming session uncovered five themes that Nouwen assumed about his audience. First, Nouwen assumed that his friend wanted to hear his thoughts. Second, Nouwen assumed that his message could reach this secular group of people. Third, Nouwen assumed that everyone reading the book would have the same reference points or background knowledge about the bible and Christianity. Fourth, he assumed that his audience would not only understand but believe the bible and fifth that his theme with specific communion words would resonate. One participant responded to Nouwen's intention to write to a secular audience about the spiritual life by saying it was like "trying to describe the color blue to a blind person without giving them something to hold or taste." Another participant felt that Nouwen's friends needed him to share something he learned on the journey without using religious language.

The second part of question three offered an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their own journey with the book. It asked them to describe areas of resistance and openness as they engaged in the reading. Two of the participants felt resistance at the beginning of the book. They cited needing to work through personal judgments. One person noticed Nouwen's perspective of God to be Other, so she struggled to connect because she believes in 'God within me.' Both participants worked through their judgements and differences and return with an openness to Nouwen's writing. One of the two participants began to feel open to his words at the theme blessing. The following themes in the book continued to shift her to feeling open to his message. Three of the participants felt open to his message from the beginning of the book. One of the three participants noticed a feeling of excitement about a new experience contributed

to a sense of openness to Nouwen's writing and that Nouwen's words connected to personal beliefs regarding love and chosenness. The second of the three participants began with openness, shifted to feeling resistance during the reading, worked through judgments and returned to a feeling of openness. The third participant read the book three times. In the first reading, the participant heard Nouwen's words. In the second reading, a shift occurred to feeling open to receive his words and in the third reading, the participant found a place for all people in the reading.

There were times when facilitating the dialogue became difficult. The first experience happened when a participant's body language and facial expressions revealed a resistance to Nouwen's words from the beginning. The principle investigator wrote, "I struggled here because of her body language: she armored up, her face changed to more rigid. I wondered how she could read his words on page 30 about wanting all people no matter of religious tradition or no religious tradition to feel that they are the Beloved. How did she hear these words? As bait and switch? Did she lack the trust to fully hear them because of a past wound? How could a Christian speak these words in a way that she can hear them for what they are? Is it only in relationship? Baffled. I wanted to jump in and teach for a moment. I wanted to refer back to page 30. I wanted to defend Nouwen. I felt protective of Nouwen's words. I quickly felt my resistance to her experience of the book and took some deep breaths so that I could return to hearing her words. I did this by coming back to my intention: hear and see."

The second situation came at the end of the dialogue during the connected conversations. The principle investigator felt sad that the participants could not see and hear Nouwen's words and wanted to bring the group back to Nouwen's intention as stated on page 30 of the book. The principle investigator wrote, "I thought to add a teaching moment at the end of our connected

conversation and then I could not find page 30. I realized that this would feel confrontational and went against my intention, so I physically set the book aside and continued to see and hear.” The principle investigator hoped that by the end of the book, the participants would see Nouwen’s writing as a gift even if they struggled through his religious language.

The fourth question quoted Nouwen saying, “But where and how can we rediscover the sacred and give it the central place in our lives?”²¹⁷ Each participant reflected on a sense of the sacred in the world. They agreed that every person holds something sacred and what is sacred to each person is reflected in what people value and prioritize. The responses to how to rediscover a sense of the sacred involved creating awareness around the idea of sacredness by first embracing what is sacred in each participant’s sense of self, by holding space for conversations about what is sacred to each person, and by creating opportunities to engage in a movement or action upon a sacred value. One participant offered that becoming aware of the sacred is like awareness of a breath of air and the quench of thirst by water. The sacred is essential to life, but awareness is the key.

The next set of questions asked the participants to reflect on how the conversations connected. The first question asked if there is something the participants would like to ask each other to provide clarity around a statement made. The participants either did not feel comfortable with this opportunity, forgot statements made that evoked questions, or did not understand the opportunity. The responses given by the participants merged with the second question about themes. Through the responses, the principle investigator noted three categories. The first category acknowledged that people desire to be seen and heard. Seeing and hearing

²¹⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 147.

another human being shows worth, value and sacredness while offering the person an opportunity to explore what that means for them. Second, the participants recognized the need to become aware of what things hold a sacred place in life by gazing back through personal history and through evaluating if spoken values match how life is lived. Lastly, the theme ‘gift’ emerged. The idea that each person offers a gift and the job becomes discovering what the gift of their presence means.

The second question gave each participant the opportunity to share a truth that emerged through the dialogue. One participant said that the entire dialogue reflected the truth in Namaste. The participant noted that from the beginning of the Satsang Yoga to the end “the light in me honors the light in you” was present. Most of the comments fell under this category. Participants responded by noting the sacred space for participants to find their voice, love that permeates all, finding the light inside, and embracing the other. The idea of “the other” brought more responses including being open to other’s experiences, asking questions about these experiences, giving them a space to find their voice, showing the value of the other, and expanding words so that others can understand and feel included.

The final question asked the participants to share a gift or insight they received through participation in this project. Most of the comments included reflecting on the loss of and the need for community. One comment described a process of discerning when to be inclusive and when to be exclusive. A participant shared a sense of love in the group and another said that the entire group rejected religiosity.

Retreat Center Feedback Forms

The first two questions on the feedback form asked the participants to write what was most satisfying about the Satsang and what was least satisfying. The most satisfying part of the experience was the sharing. A participant wrote that each person shared something vulnerable and another wrote that the dialogue was most satisfying. Next, the participants responded that the space felt safe enough to participate, the yoga was most satisfying because it set the sacred space and the community activity prepared everyone for dialogue. One participant mentioned that the format of the Satsang flowed. The second question asked the participants to share what was least satisfying about the Satsang. Two participants wrote that nothing was least satisfying. One participant wrote that the format was most satisfying and least satisfying because it was hard to speak within the time frame. One person would have liked to see more people at the Satsang while one participant wrote that one person talked too much.

The third question asked the participants to offer design suggestions for the Satsang retreat. The category that received the most responses was about time. The participants would have liked to have more time so that the time spent at the retreat center could be more flexible, include longer or more yoga segments, include outdoor elements like labyrinth walking, and to visibly display time during the dialogue. Lastly, one participant offered the suggestion that for future Satsangs the leader would need to think about how to carry the thread between episodic Satsangs.

Lastly, the participants reflected on what they learned through spending time in the retreat Satsang format. Two responses reflected thoughts about words. One realized a connection to Nouwen's idea of blessing while the other realized how words can sound exclusive or inclusive and felt invited to consider words as an opportunity to be more inclusive. One participant felt surprised by the ability to do "vigorous yoga." Another participant felt invited to

practice journaling again. The last participant observed that they love everything they experience.

The final note written by the principle investigator acknowledged several participants words that echoed a theme from Nouwen's extensive writing and that is reflected in Chapter Two of this dissertation. In the connected conversations portion of the dialogue, the theme of seeing people as gifts emerged. One participant commented, "Everyone has something to offer you; figure out why they are in your life." The principle investigator recognized that the group felt this statement to be true and yet the reality is that the principle investigator and the participants struggled to acknowledge, appreciate, affirm, and absorb the gift of Nouwen and each other. The struggle does not mean the process, participants, or principle investigator failed. This is a truth revealed through Satsang Yoga. A spiritual community needs continued opportunity to engage in dialogue with people who differ. When in a safe enough space, the practice of the community is to see and hear the struggle in themselves and recognize that this same struggle is present in others.

Chapter 5

New Understandings

Brian McLaren writes about *The Great Spiritual Migration* being a movement away from traditional religious structures to creating a movement where religion is the energy that inspires engagement in the pursuit of peace for all of God's creation.²¹⁸ The migration of participants away from traditional religious structures has already occurred what is needed now is for leaders to enter this new space using new tools "inviting people into heart-to-heart communion and collaboration with God and neighbors in the great work of healing the earth, of building the beloved community, of seeking first the kingdom of God and God's justice for all."²¹⁹ This project was designed with the recognition that all people across Christian denominations, religious traditions, and spiritual practices, and those with no religious background can be invited to belong and to share their experience of the Divine. The work is built on the biblical figure of Hagar and her encounter with the Divine.

Hagar's story provides the theological foundation for a Christian minister to create an inclusive community inviting people from any or no religious background to share their experience of the Divine. I understood my writing about Hagar to be a crucial theological foundation for understanding The Other. I recognized that the story offered three significant truths right at the beginning of our sacred text. First, God's particular love for one people does not preclude love for other people. God reaches beyond human boundary lines of religion, sex, culture, race, and ethnicity. Second, God's love transforms people leading them to holistic healing. Third, people have unique experiences of the Divine. It is imperative that communities

²¹⁸ Brian D. McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, 174,

²¹⁹ Brian D. McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, 175.

are formed where these unique experiences are shared. Hearing and seeing the other's experience of the Divine expands the consciousness of the community.

Having a solid theological foundation, I searched to find leadership principles to guide me in my journey from a traditional Christian religious setting into the space of The Other. Henri Nouwen posed as the guru for our Satsang Yoga gatherings, so I followed his writings to establish a protocol for leadership in my new ministry role. The three principles I observed in Nouwen's leadership included continually saying yes to God in expanding those I see as included in God's love, developing compassion for myself, and seeing each person that comes into my life as a gift from God. Nouwen's book, *Life of the Beloved* offered the participants an inclusive text written by Nouwen for people who did not engage in traditional religious practice. Yoga invited the participants into an inclusive spiritual practice that does not attempt to promote a connection to the Divine, but does not shy away from talking about union with the Divine. By the end of the project, I realized I was searching for a new tools to enter a new space where inclusion is the guiding principle.

In the creation phase of the project, I thought the Other in my project would be people who no longer attend church or a traditional religious institution, but find spiritual nourishment in their practice of yoga. When I created the demographic questionnaire, I included a section asking my participants to circle their religious tradition. I asked them to circle all that apply, but I did not mindfully write this instruction. My intention was to allow each person to describe who they are in the fullest way possible by giving them freedom to choose what best describes them in each question on the form. I am grateful I allowed them to circle all that apply because the questionnaire revealed something that I did not know existed. I expected each person to circle one religious tradition in their background, but many of the participants circled two or more

traditions. The Other in my project are those that claim more than one religious tradition in their background.

Patricia Shelly writes, “If we claim the legacy of Hagar, if we embrace her as a sister, we will find ourselves hearing God’s voice in the midst of our experience, and perhaps-boldly-daring to name the God (who will be who God will be) in new ways.”²²⁰ The God of a spiritually fluid person’s experience needs to be shared for the benefit of all who will listen so that definitions and boundaries of God’s love in the world are invited to expand. Hagar’s experience gave birth to the understanding that God sees, that we can see God, and that each of us has the power to name the God of our experience. She is our sacred text’s archetype of the Other. Listening becomes the way in which Christ-followers see God in the face of the Other.

Listening to the Other in my project, I learned the importance of inclusive language to create a space that is safe enough for participation. When looking at all of the word clouds and summaries of my project, I wrote this summary statement: When words feel expansive and inclusive, I feel the freedom to be me and share my experience while listening helps me understand my uniqueness in the group and connectedness to the group that inspires hope for the future. The first two ideas presented from Henri Nouwen’s *Life of the Beloved* highlighted the sensitivity of the group to feeling left out. In exploring how it felt to be called The Beloved, some heard the name to only include one person leaving everyone else out. In the retreat group, the use of The Beloved as including everyone felt contradictory to his use of exclusively Christian communion phrases throughout the book. Nouwen’s use of the word chosen presented a problem in that if one person is chosen then the other person is not chosen. My project began to

²²⁰ Patricia Shelly, “Hagar and the God-Who-Sees’: Reflections on Genesis 16:3-13,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 268.

open my ears to the many ways the Christian language sounds exclusive to the Other while exploring ways of promoting what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks calls “sacred texts in their maximal generosity”²²¹ and what Richard Rohr describes as “The Universal Christ.”²²²

The theological shift to seeing God in the face of the Other found its roots in the Hebrew Bible. One of our problems is that we read the stories of the Hebrew Bible with a dualistic view that sees one side as all good against the other side that is all bad. Instead of viewing insiders as good and outsiders as bad, the stories of the bible invite the reader to see that good and bad are inside every person. The struggle is not with the other person; the struggle is inside us. The Hebrew Bible is filled with characters who embody this struggle.²²³ Another problem is the idea that God’s love is a limited commodity. With this view, if one group of people possesses God’s love, then the Other group has less of God’s love.²²⁴ The stories in the Hebrew bible show God’s universal love for creation and God’s particular love for a group of people while holding space for other stories to emerge that show God’s love for the Other.²²⁵

The Other always had a place in our Christian tradition, but just like we failed to humanize Hagar, we failed to see and hear the message throughout our New Testament sacred text. Barbara Brown Taylor offers the many stories of Jesus’ life and ministry being shaped by the Other: magi lead us to Jesus, the roman centurion, the Samaritan woman at the well, and the Syrophoenician woman. When we read these stories, we tend to baptize these Others as

²²¹ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 262.

²²² Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 20-21.

²²³ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 64.

²²⁴ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 100-101.

²²⁵ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 194-195.

Christians meaning that we understand the stories to say that they have faith in Jesus and return home to live Christian lives.²²⁶

Failing to see and hear the message of the Other in our sacred text, we logically failed to see and hear the Other in our homes, churches, and community. A participant in my project said that the message of the entire retreat was housed in the word Namaste. She felt that the Satsang Yoga format walked the participants through a practice that invites participants to see that the light in themselves is the same light in the Other. Our natural tendency towards groupishness and the failure to understand our mission keeps the Christian tradition from embracing the light in the Other. Thankfully, I discovered a new way of seeing that Christians are embracing today.

Rohr writes, “We all have the same objective gift, but how and whether we subjectively say yes to our implanted *imago Dei* is quite different. We all and already have image; we choose and allow likeness.”²²⁷ The guiding scripture for this new way of seeing is found in Genesis 1 where God creates and calls creation good. God creates human beings in God’s image and calls them very good. Thus, the Divine DNA is encoded in all of creation. The practice and teachings of yoga enhance this Christian understanding by adding that over time our inherent goodness is covered by wounds and walls are built to protect from further damage. The practice of Satsang Yoga helps peel away the layers of protection, heal the wounds, and encourage human beings to express their best selves.

Another theme in my project reflected the participants desire to feel solidarity with each other as humans who are blessed and broken while maintaining a celebration of diversity. My

²²⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* (New York: Harper One, 2019), 108.

²²⁷ Richard Rohr, “Confusions About Pantheism” in *How I found God in Everyone and Everywhere: An Anthology of Spiritual Memoirs*, eds. Andrew M. Davis and Phillip Clayton (Rhinebeck, New York: Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2018), 195.

yoga teacher once said that she wished we could all just appreciate our connectedness as human beings without being concerned about our religious traditions. I heard her words to reflect a longing to move away from our natural tendency to divide and I felt something lacking in her statement. Upon reflection, I realized that her statement embraced our similarities while discounting our differences. If I am only seen as a human being, then I am not truly seen. I am seen when a person embraces what makes me unique: my physical appearance, my interests, my dislikes, and even my religious tradition as it influences how I live my life. While my participants longed to feel a sense of solidarity through shared human experience, they also longed to share their uniqueness.

The one experience of the essence of Satsang, truth being collectively expressed, at the University of Houston happened during the conversation around “chosenness.” One person explained that “chosenness” comes from within. Another person added, “I choose to be chosen.” Several participants responded affirmatively and then we sat in silence absorbing the truth of this moment. Spiritually fluid people are looking for practices that connect them to their internal wisdom, people and creation; they already see God inherently present in everyone and everywhere.²²⁸ The invitation is to experience God in all things with continued openness to God speaking through something or someone new while allowing each person the freedom to choose their “chosenness.” God created freely giving creation the freedom to choose their “chosenness.”

My understanding is that church is a community where people are engaged in the transformation process. I see in Satsang Yoga a pathway that allows a community to gather around a shared practice that provides a way, a path for transformation. Richard Rohr writes that

²²⁸ Duane R. Bidwell, *When One Religion Isn't Enough: The Lives of Spiritually Fluid People* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 41-42.

we need practices that embody our knowing where we experience the God of our understanding while not analyzing what we are experiencing so that the body remembers what the mind forgets. Using the whole person made up of body, mind, and spirit, promotes transformation and healing. Jesus healed those who suffered and as followers of Jesus, not just worshippers of Jesus, we must be about the work of healing.²²⁹ He goes on to say that any practice can be a sacrament if it draws us closer to the Creator.²³⁰

My work continues as I offer the practice created through this project in new locations. I am searching my own heart for ways that I am clinging to a structure instead of continuing to say “Yes” to God’s call. I am learning to embrace those who disagree with me as God’s gift to help me clarify my vision. I am convinced that my project’s message to the church is a hopeful message. At a time when churches are closing their doors and financial struggles challenge those still engaged in traditional church work, I see that “church” is happening in the world. God is present and active in creative and healing ways beyond our church doors. If we set the church free, the opportunities are endless for where we might see church popping up in the world.

²²⁹ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 106.

²³⁰ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 221-224.

Appendix 1

Flyer for University of Houston Gathering



This April join us at the A.D. Bruce Religion Center for

Satsang

We will explore yoga, meditation and dialogue. The dialogue will center around the themes in Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*.

Come for 1 Satsang or engage in all 5. No experience necessary. All are welcome.

Amber Mattingly will lead the Satsang in partial fulfillment for the Doctorate of Ministry Program at Claremont School of Theology. For more information contact Amber Mattingly at amber.mattingly@cst.edu

Hosted by United Campus Ministries

An Invitation

You are invited to participate in the Doctorate of Ministry project titled, “From the pew to your mat.” The principle investigator is Amber Mattingly who can be reached at 417-773-9764 or by email at amber.mattingly@cst.edu.

The project has two goals: 1- to listen and learn from people of any or no religious background their thoughts and feelings about Henri Nouwen’s *Life of the Beloved* and 2- to explore the Satsang model for future use in interreligious spiritual gatherings. To meet the first goal, this project will offer Christian sacred text and a guide for exploration by the participant. After completion of reading the book and filling out the guide, each participant will be offered time to talk about the text during the dialogue. The principle investigator will only serve as facilitator of the dialogue. The principle investigator’s role is to facilitate, listen and take notes.

To meet the second goal, this project designed a Satsang with the following elements: lighting a candle to represent Divine presence, yoga asanas, meditation, dialogue, closing ceremony and feedback. To create a space that is safe enough for dialogue, communication agreements will be established between the participants. It is the job of the principle investigator to hold each participant to the communication agreements.

Attached you will find the book, guide, consent form, and communication agreements. Please carefully read over the material and feel free to ask questions about the Doctorate of Ministry project. The Satsang will be held at the Faith and Wellness Retreat Center in Waller, Texas. The Satsang will begin at 1pm and end at 6pm. A Farm to Table Dinner will follow the Satsang, but is an optional part of the experience.

I appreciate your support and look forward to experiencing this project with you. You are important. Your voice needs to be heard.

Namaste, Amber Mattingly

Appendix 2

Who is Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen was born in Nijkerk, Holland in 1932. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1957 and was a student at the Catholic University of Nijmegen where he studied psychology. He moved to the United States in 1964 to study at the Menninger Clinic and later, he taught at the University of Notre Dame, the Divinity School at Yale, and the Divinity School at Harvard. During the 1970's, he lived with Trappists monks in the Abbey of Genesee, and in the 1980's he lived in Peru among the poor. In 1985 he found his calling living at L'Arche in Trosly, France, a home founded by Jean Vanier where people with special needs live with assistants. One year later, Nouwen moved to L'Arche Daybreak near Toronto, Canada. He lived at L'Arche Daybreak for 10 years.

The story of how the *Life of the Beloved* developed began while Nouwen worked at Yale. During his time at Yale, he befriended a reporter named Fred Bratman. After ten years of friendship, Fred asked Henri to write about the spiritual life for people living in the secular world. Fred, of Jewish background, found religious writing too steeped in insider language that only people who grew up in the church would understand. Nouwen longed to see Bratman find a fresh connection to his faith, so he embarked on the great challenge of speaking words of hope to those no longer nourished by words and ideas from traditional religious circles.

Bratman said, "Visit me more often; talk to my friends; look attentively at what you see, and listen carefully to what you hear. You will discover a cry welling up from the depths of the human heart that has remained unheard because there was no one to listen."

While living at L'Arche Daybreak, Nouwen wrote *Life of the Beloved*. He suffered a heart attack and died suddenly on September 21st, 1996. For more information, please visit <https://henrinouwen.org/>

Appendix 3

Participant Information

1. As a fellow traveler, describe the landscape of your religious and or spiritual background?

2. What does your current spiritual, life-giving practice look like?

3. What (if any) are your feelings about reading this book or participation in this project?

4. What (if any) are your hopes/longings/yearnings about participation in this project?

Appendix 4

Being The Beloved

I can only look for something that I have, to some degree,
already found.

Deep in the recesses of our minds and hearts
there lies hidden the treasure
we seek.

Pg 44

What images or stories come to mind when you read this chapter?

How do you feel about being called “The Beloved?” In your tradition, do you have similar words? What words would more closely reflect your experience of the Divine?

In this section of the book, what surprised you? What frustrated you the most? Why?

Nouwen felt his listeners longed to find their value, their worth, their loveliness in something/someone other than their professional skills, money, influence or power. Does this longing resonate with your story? How?

Taken

Our awareness of being chosen

Opens our eyes

To the Chosenness of others.

That is the great joy
of being chosen: The discovery
that others are chosen as well.

Pg 63

What did you think about the use of “taken” and “chosen?” Do you resonate with those words? If not, what words would you use?

In what ways have you experienced being chosen?

What message felt true for you in this chapter? What part of this chapter frustrated you?

Did this chapter feel exclusive or inclusive? In what ways?

Blessed

A Blessing touches the
Original goodness
Of the other and calls forth
His or her Belovedness.

Pg 69

In what way does this quote resonate with you? Does the word “blessing” speak to you or what word would you use?

How did you feel reading the story on pages 69-72?

Have you ever received a formal or informal “blessing?” Formal meaning, you knew at the time that someone was going to give you a blessing. Informal meaning, words were spoken and later you realized the impact of those words. If you have, write your story here. If you have not, write your feelings about having not received a blessing. If you need more space, please attach your story to the back of this guide.

Did something else ring true for you in this chapter? Or frustrate you?

Broken

And so the great task
Becomes that of allowing the blessing to touch
Us in our brokenness. Then our brokenness will gradually
Come to be seen as an opening
Toward the full acceptance of ourselves
As the Beloved.

Pg 98

Do you connect to the idea of experiencing brokenness? If so, how? If not, what word would you substitute? Or does this not speak to you at all?

Has a wound or hurt impacted your spiritual journey? If you are able, please share your story.

What obstacles do you experience in trusting a Divine love?

How does exploring the possibility of unconditional love provide an entrance to healing this wound?

Given

The real question is not

“What can we offer each other?”

But “Who can we be for each other?”

It is the gift of our own life

That shines through all we do.

Pg 113

What truth do you hear in this chapter? What would you change to allow the truth to resonate with you more fully?

What image or story comes to mind when you read this chapter?

Who do you feel exemplifies what it means to experience a love so deeply that they give love freely to others?

Further Reflection

Now, how do you feel about being called, “The Beloved?” Have your feelings changed since chapter 1? In what ways?

What (if any) new vision did Nouwen write about that spoke to you personally?

What (if any) longings within you did Nouwen speak to?

What hopes/longings/yearnings of your heart were not reached?

After reading the book, what do you feel invited to consider?

Appendix 5

Personal Statements

Using Chapter 10 of Dressler's Standing in the Fire

What am I here to contribute in the world? Safe Space for honest conversation, teaching about Satsang, a listening ear

What principles guide my work? Honesty, Integrity, Excellence, Compassion

What is my job? To be clear in teaching, to engage the participants, to watch their physical responses, hear their words, to evolve through evaluations, and create a safe space

What is not my job? To make people speak, to be perfect, to create a wisdom moment

4 sentences 1-I am a safe haven for people to find rest.
 2-I am an ear for the cry of the human heart.
 3-I am the eyes who see the hidden suffering.
 4-I am the voice in the wilderness for those who have no voice.

Who is in the room with me? Henri Nouwen, Jesus, Mother Theresa

Remember: The space represents awaiting.

Appendix 6

Music Playlist for Satsang on Spotify

Give me Peace	DJ Taz Rashid-Gospel Nomad
Breathe It In	Beautiful Chorus-Mantras in Love
Your Beloved	By the Tree-Hold You High
Unconditionally	Katy Perry-PRISM
I Am	Satsang-The Story of You
I See You	MISSIO-I See You
Just Imagine It	MKTO-Bad Girls EP
I'm Still a Believer	HeartWerk, Dr. Freeman-Elements, Vol. 3
Born This Way	Lady Gaga-Born This Way
Ayahuasca at Night	Big Wild-Ayahuasca at Night
A Reminder	Trevor Hall, East Forest-A Reminder
Heal Me	Isaac Shepard-Quiet
Kyrie Eleison	Piano Prayer-Never Lose Sight
There Is a Light	Steve Gold-Let Your Heart Be Known
Vyana	East Forest-Prana

Appendix 7

Message given during Yoga Asanas

Contemporary philosopher Ken Wilber says that when a group of people give themselves over to selfless emotions, we find a state of unity and love that he calls “We-space.”

Sally Kempton is an author, a meditation teacher, and the founder of Dharana Institute says, “The Buddha, after all, did make the sangha, the spiritual community, one of the three cornerstones of his path, just as Jesus told his disciples, “When two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

In yoga our breath patterns sync and our hearts start beating in a similar pattern and this creates a mystical field, a field of grace. The Sanskrit name for this phenomenon is satsang which means “truth company.” According to several texts of yoga, Satsang is one of the great doorways to inner freedom.

Appendix 8

Commitments

- 1- In Satsang, the commitment is to awaken and uplift yourselves and to unmask illusions by embracing truth.
- 2- We commit to seeing each other's inherent goodness noticing judgements when they arise and letting them go.
- 3- We commit to listening as though God, love, light, creative energy, a higher power or that which has no name speaks through and from within the other person.

Agreements

- 1-We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience; we will not take on the burden of trying to speak for an entire identity group.
- 2-We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear.
- 3-We will “pass” or “pass for now” if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question-no explanation required.
- 4-If asked to keep something confidential, we will honor the request.
- 5-We will participate within the time frame given by the principle investigator and share time during the unstructured portion of the dialogue.
- 6-The principle investigator i.e. facilitator's job is to uphold the communication agreements. The principle investigator will not be a participant in the dialogue, but will listen and take notes.

Structure

A question will be asked by the principle investigator and each person will have 1-2 minutes to answer the question depending on the number of participants present. The principle investigator will keep time on a phone setting the phone to chime at 1-2 minutes. If needed, the principle investigator will ask the participant to complete their statement after the chime. We will not interrupt unless we can't hear the speaker. If an insight arises, please write it down so that it can be shared during our time to share insights.

We will sit for 15 seconds to absorb the response given and then the participant will invite the next participant to speak.

Appendix 9

Questionnaire

From the Pew to the Mat

Circle your Answers

1. Which age group describes you?

18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49
50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89

2. Which answer describes you?

Male	Other
Female	Prefer not to answer

3. What is your religious background? Circle all that apply

Christian	Hindu
Buddhist	Mormon
Jewish	Jehovah's Witness
Muslim	Other: _____

Still Currently Practicing? Yes or No or A blend of traditional Religious practice

4. What is your current spiritual practice? Circle all that apply

Church/Synagogue/Mosque/Temple	Art/creative expressions
Prayer/Meditation/Contemplation	Sacred Gatherings: _____
Reading Sacred Texts	Giving/Serving
Yoga/Tai Chi	Other: _____

Appendix 10

Retreat Schedule

1pm-1:15pm	Arrive, Paperwork, Nametags and Set your Sacred Space
1:15pm-1:30pm	Light the candle, Clearing and Breath Meditation
1:30pm-2:30pm	Yoga Practice
2:30pm-2:45pm	Loving-Kindness Meditation
2:45pm-3pm	Break and Set the Space for Dialogue
3pm-4:30pm	Dialogue
4:30pm-4:45pm	Break
4:45pm-5:45pm	Insights
5:45pm-6pm	Gratitude and Closing Meditation

Facilitator

Purpose

Role of Facilitator

Agreements

Structure

Questions

1- Does a loved one have a special name for you? What is it? Do you have a special name for a loved one? What is it? (1 min)

2- Fred asked Nouwen to “visit me more often; talk to my friends; look attentively at what you see, and listen carefully to what you hear. You will discover a cry welling up from the depths of the human heart that has remained unheard because there was no one to listen.”

What quote/theme/word resonated with you the most? Why?
(2 min)

What was Nouwen

3- Nouwen wonders why he was not able to speak to Fred and his friends through his writings. Fred says, “Although it is clear that you try to write for me and my friends from your center and although you express to us what is most precious to you, you do not realize how far we are from where you are. You speak from a context and tradition that is alien to us and your words are based on many presuppositions that we don’t share with you. You are not aware how truly secular we are. Many, many questions need to be answered before we are able to be fully open to what you say about the Life of the Beloved.”

First, let’s brainstorm together about the assumptions you felt Nouwen made.

As you read the book, did you experience an energetic shift/an opening towards his message? Which description more closely matches your experience? Then, answer the question that follows.

I was fully open from the beginning: What practice/experience/knowledge allowed you to begin with an open mind, body and spirit?

I felt resistance at the beginning and then an openness: What assumptions/ questions were answered that allowed the shift?

I felt resistance: What assumptions does he make or questions does he not answer that needed to be addressed to allow an opening. (2 min)

4- Nouwen hoped to bridge the gap between what Fred described as the secular world and what Nouwen describes as the spiritual world. Fred said that the sacred has disappeared from our world leaving the human imagination feeling empty. Nouwen asks, “But where and how can we rediscover the sacred and give it the central place in our lives?”
(2 min)

Connected Conversations

Ask a Question: Is there something someone said that you’d like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

What theme keeps bubbling up through our dialogue that feels true for you?

What gift or insight have you received from our dialogue today?

Gratitude & Closing

Satsang Program: Week One at the University of Houston

11:30am	Light the Candle
11:30am-11:32am	Compassionate Body Scan Meditation
11:32am-11:47am	Yoga
11:47am-11:50am	Breath Meditation with Loving Presence
11:50am-12:15pm	Dialogue
12:15pm-12:25pm	Insights
12:25pm-12:30pm	Gratitude and Closing Meditation
12:30pm	Feedback Forms

Dialogue

1. Review Commitments/Agreements/Structure
2. Introduction to Henri Nouwen and Theme

Who is Henri Nouwen (sheet)

First theme: Being the Beloved

This is the summary of his book. He longs for his friend, Fred, and any person of any faith tradition who reads his words to know that they are the Beloved.

3. Read pages 36-38
4. Questions for Dialogue

Does a loved one have a special nick-name for you? What is that special name? Do you have a special name for your loved one? What is that special name?

How do you feel about being called “The Beloved?” In your tradition, do you have similar words? What words would more closely reflect your experience of the Divine?

Nouwen suggests that tending to your spiritual life “the Life of the Beloved” is like uncovering a well deep within. Does this resonate with your spiritual journey? If so, in what ways. If not, how would you describe your spiritual journey?

5. Insights: Share a gift or insight you received from our time together

Appendix 11

Satsang Feedback Form for Retreat and First Four Gatherings at The University of Houston

In partial fulfillment for the Doctorate of Ministry Project at Claremont School of Theology

The Satsang is the entire hour-long experience: lighting the candle, meditation, yoga, meditation, dialogue, and meditation.

1. What was most satisfying, enriching, or valuable about your experience in the Satsang?
2. What was less than satisfying, frustrating, or disappointing?
3. The Satsang is the entire hour-long experience: lighting the candle, meditation, yoga, meditation, dialogue, and meditation. What advice or suggestions would you offer the principle investigator about the design? Change something/add something/ more time/less time
4. What did you learn about yourself through this experiment?

Final Feedback Form for Fifth Satsang

University of Houston

1. How many Satsangs were you able to participate in?
2. Did you feel that the Satsang created a safe enough space for you to participate?
How did you know you felt safe?

3. What elements would you say made the space safe enough?

4. Would you participate in future Satsangs... check what applies

On campus _____ I'll come if it is free _____

Off campus _____ I'll come if it is \$5-7 _____

I know that I won't come _____

5. What changes if any did you notice in yourself as a result of the Satsangs?

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